# Building Stronger Teams

Supporting Effective Team Leaders

A leader's guide and activities for developing
resilience for you and your team

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A free digital version of this guide is available
at *www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com*

About the Centre

The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (the Centre) was established in 2007 and has three main objectives:

1. Increase knowledge and awareness of workplace psychological health and safety

2. Improve the ability to respond to mental health issues at work

3. Turn knowledge into action through free, practical strategies and tools for all employers

The Centre works to achieve these objectives by:

Funding and sponsoring research and initiatives aimed at improving the understanding, prevention and management of mental health issues, particularly as they impact the workplace

Promoting and facilitating knowledge exchange through the sharing of research, resources and survey results

Supporting the development of programs and resources aimed at improving psychological health and safety in the workplace

The *Workplace Strategies for Mental Health* website, *www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com*, is the primary vehicle through which the Centre makes these resources available.

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Introduction

Many of us are put into leadership roles without having any training on how to actually lead. There can be an emotional cost to leadership that can impact our mental health as well as the mental health of those we lead, manage and support. Higher levels of emotional intelligence can help reduce our own stress while positively impacting the effectiveness of our teams.

Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to manage one's own emotions, as well as the ability to recognize and appropriately respond the emotional distress of others.

Resilience is the ability to withstand both everyday stressors and more serious incidents without damage to mental health.

Teams are successful when the competence and confidence of each member is supported.

Self-awareness and good communication skills are the hallmarks of effective leaders. The first section of this book, *Supporting Effective Team Leaders*, can help you develop these skills.

The second section, *Building Stronger Teams*, provides practical activities for developing your team's ability to problem solve, be objective and work well together. All of these skills are related to emotional intelligence and resilience.

This book draws on the emotional intelligence resources developed by Joti Samra, R.Psych., for the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace. This work is available online at *www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/ free-training-and-tools/emotional-intelligence*.

In addition to Dr. Samra's work, the team-building activities provided in *Building Stronger Teams* were developed by experts from across Canada who came together to share their knowledge and insights. The activities can help teams respond more effectively to stressors, resolve issues, and support each other through challenging times.

As a leader, you can choose to work through the book from beginning to end as a comprehensive approach to building team resilience, or you can pick and choose from the activities provided and use those that are the best fit for you and your team.

You may want to consider conducting an assessment using any of the free resources referenced in Addendum A to gain a better understanding of your current state of resilience, emotional intelligence or management style.

Why is building resilience important for teams?

In a 2015 study on resilience[1] , researchers reported on the value of resilience with work teams as follows: "Some professional groups work in highly stressful settings and are therefore particularly at risk of conditions such as anxiety, depression, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout. However, some individuals are less affected by workplace stress and the associated negative outcomes. Such individuals have been described as 'resilient'…Workplace stress has serious implications for the quality of a team member's work and their general psychological functioning."

Personal resilience is the result of many factors including genetics, family history, personal experience, learned behaviour, and state of health. The more unprepared or helpless someone feels in a situation, the more likely they may be at risk of harm. The risk of harm can be reduced when you have the support of team members, prepare for challenging situations, and develop relevant problem solving skills.

Serious traumatic incidents in the workplace pose a significant risk for psychological harm. Psychological harm occurs when exposure to a stressor overwhelms a person's ability to cope with everyday life. Resilience may help preserve or restore one's coping strategies in these situations. Psychological harm can impact all aspects of a person's ability to function at work, including how they think, manage change or conflict, and relate to their co-workers.

We often think of serious traumatic events as including a threat to life or safety. But any situation in any job that leaves a person feeling overwhelmed can affect their ability to work and cope. This can include perceptions of conflict, bullying, harassment, betrayal or humiliation.

No one can predict when a person may be psychologically harmed. It is a person's individual perspective of what occurred, rather than the objective facts, that determines whether they will experience a negative impact.

The activities that follow focus on common workplace issues that you can customize for your unique situation to help build resilience for yourself and your team.

Additional activities are available at:

www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

[1] Understanding individual resilience in the workplace: the international collaboration of workforce resilience model Clare S. Rees*, Lauren J. Breen, Lynette Cusack and Desley Hegney, Frontiers in Psychology, HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY ARTICLE, February 2015

Supporting Effective Team Leaders

Chapter 1

It's Not Always Easy

A strong team leader is self-aware, an effective communicator, and able to inspire people to reach their potential. Most of us are not born leaders. We develop these skills over time and are required to renew and update them as we and our teams evolve.

We also need to be able to adapt to changing demands in the economy, our organizations, and our personal lives. Our health, finances, family situations, working relationships, work tasks and stress levels also have an impact on our ability to be effective leaders.

Teams are not all the same. If we are leading a team of experienced and independent people, our leadership style may be to provide a vision and then get out of their way. At another point we may inherit a team that is made up of hard workers who are concrete, linear thinkers. This group may need more structured and detailed planning time to succeed.

The approach used with the first team, which may have been wildly successful, could be disastrous with the second team. With this in mind, effective leadership is a process of continual improvement. We need to be able to adapt to a wide variety of situations.

Dealing with team members who are distressed for any reason can be especially challenging. It may cause us to feel angry, upset or somehow guilty or responsible. These types of reactions are natural, but it is possible to manage our response more effectively when we look beyond the behaviour or words and consider what may be going on with the individual. This can help us respond from a place of empathy instead of anger, anxiety, negativity, or hostility.

On the other hand, we respond to positive emotions by being drawn to people who are happy and upbeat. This can be challenging for a team leader who also needs to work with and support those who are struggling with emotional distress.

How can understanding this help you as a team leader? Sometimes simply being aware of how other people's emotions affect you can improve your ability to respond appropriately.

What follows are ideas, strategies, and exercises to help you develop these skills:

- Understanding your own perceptions
- Communicating more effectively
- Engaging team members.

60 per cent of managers/ supervisors say dealing with conflict is one of the most stressful parts of their job.

(Ipsos Reid 2012. Psychological health and safety at work.)

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Chapter 2

Understanding Your Own Perceptions

Understanding your own perceptions is a first step toward being comfortable and effective when dealing with emotionally charged situations in the workplace.

The activities in this chapter can help you develop greater awareness and strategies for addressing your response to negative emotions:

Dealing with Negative Emotions
Becoming more comfortable and effective when dealing with negative emotions such as anger or hopelessness in the workplace

How Would Others Describe You?
Looking at how others react to or perceive you

Envision Your Ideal Self
Thinking about how you would you like others to describe you
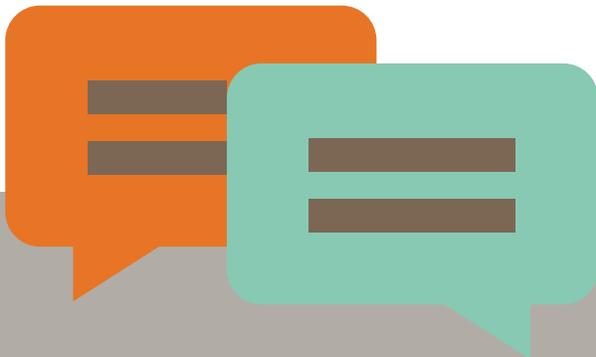
When we look at the characteristics of [an effective leader], we see a lot of what we look for in an effective mentor. We see strong communication and listening skills, realizing that communication is two-way. We see empathy in the understanding of feelings and perspectives.

(Wythe, J.M., 2014 Servant and Transformational Leadership, PennState,
https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/2014/04/01/servant-transformational-leadership/)

Dealing with Negative Emotions

Dealing with negative emotions among team members can be one of the most challenging aspects of being a leader. Think of personal barriers that commonly arise for you when called upon to address team members' negative emotions. What parts of dealing with different emotions are difficult for you? What can or have you done to overcome these barriers? Also think of times you were successful.

In the chart below, share your own personal barriers related to dealing with the following emotions that may arise in the workplace: anger, fear and sadness.

ANGER		
Dealing with other people's anger is hard for me because...	Example of a situation in which I dealt effectively with someone else's anger...	Specific things I can do to overcome my personal barriers...
I'm scared I'm going to say something wrong and the situation could turn violent.	*When John was upset about his vacation schedule and broke the printer.*	*Don't imagine worst-case scenarios. Just focus on the moment and stay calm.*

FEAR		
Dealing with other people's fear is hard for me because...	Example of a situation in which I dealt effectively with someone else's fear...	Specific things I can do to overcome my personal barriers...

SADNESS		
Dealing with other people's sadness is hard for me because…	Example of a situation in which I dealt effectively with someone else's sadness…	Specific things I can do to overcome my personal barriers…

How Would Others Describe You?

The next exercise asks you to think about how others may react to or perceive you.

Think of a current team member who you MOST enjoy managing. How would he/she describe you? What specific words and descriptors would this person use?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Think of a current team member who you LEAST enjoy managing. How would he/she describe you? What specific words and descriptors would this person use?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Place a ☑ next to those descriptors with which you agree and/or which you believe to be understandable perceptions of you.

Place an ☒ next to those with which you disagree.

Your behaviours may not always reflect the type of individual you perceive yourself to be. Think about why you might be perceived differently from how you would ultimately describe yourself. What factors might contribute to any discrepancies?

_____

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_____

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What are some specific things you could do to begin narrowing the gap between how you would describe yourself and how you might be coming across to others? Pick three specific things you could do. Be realistic.

1._____

2._____

3._____

Envision Your Ideal Self

Now that you've considered how others might describe you, let's think about how you would prefer to be seen.

Imagine a staff meeting that includes all of the key individuals you work with: team members, colleagues and your own leader(s). You are not at this meeting, and those attending are asked to write a biography describing you as a team leader. Be as honest as you can, and write what you think they might realistically say.

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Now imagine that you could rewrite/edit this biography to read exactly as you would ideally like it to. How would this revised version read?

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Most of us will find some discrepancies between the realistic and ideal versions of our biographies. Think about the main differences. How could you make changes in these areas, and what specifically can you commit to doing differently? Be realistic.

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Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Chapter 3

Communicating More Effectively

Part of our self-perception is the way we *believe* we communicate. Understanding how different communication styles impact others is important for leaders. Our interaction styles when under stress can be quite different than our usual responses. Even though our intentions may be honourable, the actual message may be perceived as harsh or insensitive.

The activities in this chapter can help you develop awareness and competency in communicating more effectively:

Communication Styles
Understanding some common communication styles

Identifying Your Interaction Style
Thinking about the communication styles you use in various circumstances

Communicating Without Judgment
Developing non-judgmental listening to help describe situations more objectively

Attribution Error
Learning not to automatically assume the worst in others' behaviour

Effective Listening
An effective communication method that involves listening, demonstrating understanding, reflecting and paraphrasing

Acknowledge, Even if you Disagree
Acknowledging that someone's feelings are valid, to allow them to feel heard and therefore better able to listen to alternate perspectives.
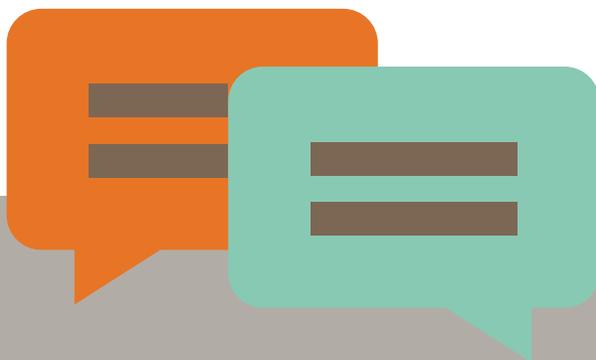
Acts of hostility by supervisors, such as ridiculing, giving the silent treatment, blaming, taking undue credit, and breaking promises, can result in negative consequences, including absenteeism, turnover and reduced productivity that can result in significant costs to organizations.

(Tepper, B. J., Duffy, M. K., Henle, C. A., & Lambert, L. S., 2006. Procedural injustice, victim precipitation, and abusive supervision. Personnel Psychology, 101-123.)

Communication Styles

There are four primary communication styles:

- Assertive
- Aggressive
- Passive
- Passive-aggressive

Assertive communication is open, straightforward and earnest. You communicate your message as clearly as possible without embedding any other underlying or hidden messages. Assertive communication can help strengthen relationships, solve problems more effectively, and reduce negative emotions such as anger, frustration, guilt and fear.

One key to communicating assertively is to take ownership of your feelings and behaviours and not blame others, i.e., *"I feel frustrated when you are late for our weekly progress meetings. I don't like starting over again and repeating myself."* This can make your directives and feedback easier to accept.

- Speak in a calm, clear and steady voice
- Show interest and sincerity by keeping eye contact, smiling and nodding as appropriate
- Maintain an open and relaxed posture
- Communicate your feelings and needs appropriately
- Communicate respect for others
- Ask for what you need rather than demanding it
- Ask questions to understand other people's perspectives
- Listen without interrupting
- Before you say no, respectfully ask why the request is being made to determine if you can meet the underlying need.

Aggressive communication means you express your own needs, desires, ideas and feelings without considering and respecting the needs or viewpoints of others. This often involves *"you" statements* and attacks on a team member, rather than effective expressions of needs. For example, rather than stating, *"you are never on time"* try, *"I need you to be on time"*.

Other characteristics of aggressive communication may include:

- Speaking in a loud, bossy and demanding voice
- Having piercing eye contact
- Maintaining an overbearing posture
- Dominating/controlling others by blaming, intimidating, criticizing, threatening or attacking
- Acting impulsively, intensely or rudely
- Demanding what you need instead of requesting it
- Focusing on your own needs and rarely asking questions
- Not listening well to the other person
- Interrupting the other person frequently
- Being unwilling to accept "no" or to make compromises.

Passive communication occurs when you do not express your own needs, desires, ideas and feelings. This may include:

• Speaking in an overly apologetic or submissive manner
• Avoiding eye contact
• Having a slumped body posture
• Holding back on stating your feelings and needs
• Giving in to other people, and ignoring your own needs
• Doing what you are asked regardless of how you feel about it
• Being unable to say "no" when asked for a favour
• Rarely asking other people for help.

Passive-aggressive communication involves being passive in the manner in which you express your needs, desires, ideas and feelings, but being aggressive in your underlying intent. Communicating passive-aggressively often involves not speaking your truth, but rather trying to convey it through challenging, sarcastic or ambiguous comments and actions. Team members are behaving passive-aggressively, for example, when they avoid speaking directly about their concerns, and express their dissatisfaction through other behaviours that may seem manipulative. This may include:

• Speaking in a sarcastic voice
• Using non-verbal behaviours such as sighing and eye-rolling
• Using facial expressions and body language that are inconsistent with how you feel,
  such as smiling when you're upset
• Avoiding dealing directly with a disruptive issue
• Appearing cooperative but acting uncooperatively
• Sabotaging another person to get even.

Aggressive, passive, and passive-aggressive communication each risk eliciting negative reactions from others. While assertive communication techniques cannot guarantee positive reactions, they are usually more effective. Communication is affected in part by the level of trust that team members have in your ability to lead.

This trust includes faith in your character and integrity, as well as in your competence to fulfill your role and lead your team.

Where trust is built up, small errors in communication may be overlooked or forgiven. Where trust is absent, even an innocent comment may be taken out of context and seen as threatening or disrespectful.

Notes:

Identifying Your Interaction Style

Now that you understand the different communication styles, let's think about how and when you use them. Although you may have a style that you use most of the time, it is common to use all of the styles at some time or another.

Think about your default style when under stress. What types of workplace situations may trigger each of the following styles for you?

Passive behaviour (not standing up for your rights; not expressing your ideas/feelings)

_____

_____

Aggressive behaviour (expressing your ideas/feelings without allowing others to do the same; getting your way at the unfair expense of others)

_____

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Passive-aggressive behaviour (communicating a hostile/unkind message through non-verbal behaviours such as eye-rolling, gesturing or ignoring others; giving deliberately frustrating verbal responses)

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Think about what you can do in stressful situations to actively remind yourself to engage in an assertive communication style where you express your needs in a clear, open, non-defensive and respectful manner, while allowing others to express their needs. This can help you interact more positively with your team members and set the stage for more open and less judgmental conversations

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Communicating Without Judgment

We need to be aware of our own perceptions around every workplace interaction or situation. Being judgmental might involve being suspicious of what is being said, focusing too strongly on the literal meaning of words, jumping to conclusions, or responding in a way that fuels mistrust and conflict. By listening and asking questions in a non-judgmental way, you have the opportunity to gain understanding of what someone is trying to convey before you respond. Here are some tips to help:

- Turn down your internal dialogue and stay focused on what is being said, rather than thinking ahead and speculating on unspoken meanings.
- Breathe, stay calm, and neutralize your emotions.
- Listen carefully and acknowledge the value of different perspectives.
- Move from judgment to curiosity by asking questions to gain better understanding.
- State what you see, hear or experience rather than commenting on someone's personality or character traits.
- Clearly state your perspectives and desired outcomes.
- Restate the issue objectively, recognizing where there's already agreement.

While this might all seem simple, these are actually challenging techniques that can take time to master.

Keep this list handy, and read through it quickly before any emotionally charged interactions where you want to keep an open mind.

Notes:

Attribution Error

We are much more likely to blame external factors, such as high demands on our time, for our own negative behaviour. When we have positive accomplishments, we're more likely to attribute it to internal strengths, such as our intelligence.

On the other hand, negative behaviour in others is often attributed to internal factors, such as lack of motivation, while we look at their positive accomplishments as attributed to external factors, such as favouritism. This concept is called the "attribution error". For example:

External Attribution
If I trip while walking across the office, I say, "the carpet was wrinkled."

Internal Attribution
If I see someone else trip on the office floor, I say, "they are clumsy."

_____

Internal Attribution
If I win an award, I assume it's because I worked hard.

External Attribution
If someone else wins an award, I assume it's because they were lucky.

_____

External Attribution
If I raise my voice in a meeting, I believe it's because of the ineptitude of others.

Internal Attribution
If someone else raises their voice in a meeting, I believe it's because they can't handle pressure.

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When you're aware of the attribution error, you can step back and consider internal or external factors that may be influencing the behaviour before rushing to judgment.

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Effective Listening

Part of being non-judgmental is listening to really understand what the other person is trying to communicate, rather than making quick assumptions or jumping to conclusions. This skill set may seem counter-intuitive to quick and decisive problem-solving. The skills that may be useful for tactical issues are often ineffective for interpersonal issues.

Effective listening is particularly important when team members are emotionally distressed. Slow down and try to accurately reflect on what you are hearing. This will help to demonstrate that you have heard and understood and will put you in a better position to address the actual issue.

The following strategies can help.

Pay Attention

- **Minimize distractions such as your phone, computer, people walking by or other interruptions.** Try to manage distracting thoughts by repeating the words that the individual says silently to yourself. This may sound odd, but it actually helps you really focus on the words that are being said. Be aware also of non-verbal communication such as the tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions and body language.

- **Show that you're listening and understanding.** By letting a team member know you are listening and understanding, you may encourage them to keep talking and also give them an opportunity to clarify their thoughts and feelings if you seem to be off track. Make eye contact, smile, nod your head, and make comments such as *yes, OK, aha, ah, oh, go on*.

Seek to Understand

- **Listen not only to the words someone is saying but consider the underlying feelings, thoughts or opinions.** For example, if a team member *appears* angry after a performance review, but says, *"I understand, and I'll work harder on those things"*, a perceptive leader will note that they may disagree but for some reason do not want to speak up.

- **Try to view the situation from the team member's perspective.** Remind yourself that the team member has had different life experiences and may not see things the way you do.

Show You Were Listening

- **When a team member is upset, angry, frustrated or anxious, acknowledge the emotion using phrases such as:**

    o *"It seems that he really upset you"*
    o *"I get the impression that you're pretty frustrated about that"*
    o *"I'm sensing that you're quite discouraged"*
    o *"I feel that you're unhappy with your situation"*.
    • Example: If a team member says, *"I'm finally finished with that stupid project!",* you could reflect back: "*It sounds like you had a hard time with it"* or "*I get the impression that you're frustrated and don't feel like doing anything like that again.*"

- Use your own words to rephrase what you heard. Use phrases such as:

    o *"So you are saying…"*
    o *"It sounds like…"*
    o *"What I'm hearing is..."*
    o *"In other words…"*
    o *"I get the impression that..."*
    o *"You mean…"*
    o *"You feel that…"*
    o *"I'm sensing…"*
    o *"I wonder if…"*.
    o *Example:* A team member approaches you wondering why another team member is leading the new project who is less experienced and hasn't been with the company as long. You could reflect back: *"It sounds like you feel the project leader decision is unfair."*

- **Ask clarifying questions if you don't completely understand the team member's message. For example:**

  - *"What I thought you just said is… Is that what you meant?"*
  - *"Sorry, I didn't follow that. What are you saying?"*
  - *"What do you mean when you say…?"*
  - *"Could you give me an example?"*
  - *"Can you tell me more about…?"*
  - *"How was that for you? What are you feeling about that?"*
  - *"It sounds like you're pretty upset. Did something happen?"*
  - *"So how will you deal with that?"*
  - *"What do you think should be done about this situation?"*

Notes:

Acknowledge, Even if you Disagree

Effective listening can help leaders better problem-solve and generate solutions that come closer to meeting everyone's needs. Listen first, and acknowledge and validate what you hear – even if you don't agree with it – before expressing your point of view. When you acknowledge a team member's perspective, it can send a strong signal that while you may or may not agree, and may or may not take the action they're requesting, you have heard the viewpoint and are taking it into consideration.

Acknowledging that someone else's feelings are valid for them, even when you do not feel the same way, can allow the other person to feel heard and therefore better able to listen. Some leaders may be apprehensive about doing this, thinking that actually acknowledging a perspective ties their hands by creating a responsibility to respond in a certain way. This is not generally true. Acknowledging another person's thoughts and feelings still leaves you with the following options:

- Agreeing or disagreeing with the person's point of view or actions
- Informing them that a request cannot be granted, but that you are willing to explore other ways to meet the same need
- Further exploring and discussing the matter under consideration.

Acknowledge your team members' ideas and requests by showing that you have heard and understood what they have said. Make sure to do so in a way that cannot be confused for agreement unless you do, in fact, agree.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Chapter 4

Engaging Team Members

Effective leaders leverage every member of their team to brainstorm ideas and address challenges. Some of the potential concerns when opening up discussions with team members can include:

• Emotional outbursts
• Negative reactions
• Unreasonable demands
• Impractical solutions
• Conflict
• Accusations

These concerns are valid and being an effective leader does not mean avoiding them, but rather learning to address them in a way that balances the well-being of those involved with your responsibilities as a leader.

The activities in this chapter can help you engage in a variety of circumstances:

Different Responses
Approach the same situation in multiple ways, all working toward the same goal.

Get to Know Your Team Members
Take time to connect, which can help create strong relationships and reduce the impact of negative emotions in the workplace.

Ask, Don't Tell
Ask questions that recognize an employee's positive strengths by affirming their past and present achievements, abilities and potential.

Invite Solutions
Convey a strong sense of trust and respect, which can make employees feel valued and more energized at work.

Seek Feedback
Offer and accept feedback, which can help create strong relationships in the workplace.

Provide Feedback
Become adept at tolerating conflict, and have the ability to respond appropriately when necessary.

Positive Feedback
Evoke positive emotions through brief conversations.
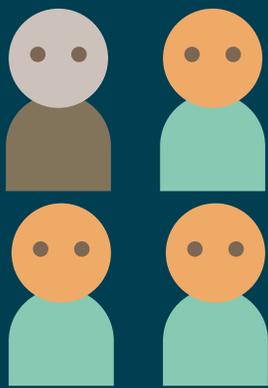
Over 25 per cent of team members in a 2012 survey reported feeling that no matter what they did, it would never be enough to please their manager/ employer.

(Ipsos Reid, 2012. Psychological health and safety at work.)

Different Responses

In the workplace setting, we often have very clear goals we are working toward. When team members are distressed or distracted, our own stress level may increase if we fear our goal may be threatened. If we respond from a place of frustration or stress, it is even less likely we will have the outcomes we desire.

Write out at least three different ways – when you are calm, when you are under pressure, and when you are frustrated – you might approach a team member in the following situations:

You overhear a team member speaking disrespectfully to a customer on the telephone.

Calm response:_____

_____

Response while under pressure:_____

_____

Frustrated response: _____

_____

You see a team member – who should be working on an urgent deadline – repeatedly checking their Facebook account throughout the day.

Calm response:_____

_____

Response while under pressure:_____

_____

Frustrated response: _____

_____

You observe a team member who is leaving the staff lunchroom teary-eyed.

Calm response:_____

_____

Response while under pressure:_____

_____

Frustrated response: _____

_____

Get to Know Your Team Members

Make a point of touching base regularly with each person who is a member of your team.

Ask if there is anything you could do that could change to help them be more effective at their job.

Take careful note of the suggestions and patterns of responses, as doing this exercise routinely can help you recognize what supports each person's success.

Building this base of knowledge in advance should make it much easier to understand and communicate with individual team members when you do encounter a challenging or emotionally charged situation.

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Ask, Don't Tell

When a team member is distressed, you may be tempted to ask a lot of questions to help you understand the situation, but it is important to take a balanced approach. Being asked too many questions may feel like an interrogation or overwhelming for the team member.

Appreciative inquiry is an approach that involves asking questions that recognize positive strengths by affirming past and present achievements, abilities and potentials.

Try asking the following types of questions, when opportunities arise:
"You seem to have a positive attitude. What do you enjoy most about your role?"
"You do many things well. What do you feel are your greatest skills?"
"You have been quite successful in your career so far. What tips and strategies have you learned over time for doing your job well?"
"How did you get that job/task done so well/quickly/efficiently?"

When a team member is distressed, try some of the following questions:
"Can you help me understand what works best for you when you are feeling upset/distressed/overwhelmed?"
"What can I do to help you do what you need to take care of yourself?"
"When you have experienced these work issues in the past, what helped you?"
"Are there ways I could help you to best make use of your strengths and skills in this situation?"

Open-ended, strength-oriented questions can convey that you value and respect the team member's experience. Appreciative inquiries like these may elicit valuable information that can help you determine how to better respond to a distressed team member. It also supports the beginning of a conversation that can focus on potential solutions.

Notes:

Invite Solutions

When there are urgent deadlines or other work pressures, the impact on leaders can often be as great, or even greater, than the impact on other team members. In times of stress, some leaders take on more of the work themselves, rather than involving the team. Or if they do involve the team, it's in a more directive way.

In times of stress, however, involving team members in problem-solving can enhance team productivity, innovation and engagement. By inviting solutions from your team, you are also conveying a sense of trust and respect, which can make team members feel valued and work harder.

Think of a situation where you invited solutions from your team. Describe the situation:

_____

_____

_____

What approaches did you take that worked well? What questions did you ask? How did you communicate trust in team members? How did you delegate responsibility to others?

_____

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How did this approach positively impact team members? What did they communicate verbally? Non-verbally? What was the impact on productivity? On engagement?

_____

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How did this approach affect you, your stress levels, and your effectiveness?

_____

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Think about upcoming situations where you could actively invite solutions from your team.

1._____

2._____

3._____

By planning ahead to engage your team when your own stress levels are rising, you are more likely to be successful in reaching positive outcomes.

Seek Feedback

Your team members may not be comfortable providing feedback unless it has been specifically requested. Even then, some may hesitate, suspecting that the call for feedback may not be wholly genuine, and that they may anger you by speaking out. Help team members feel that their feedback is valued and appreciated.

Respectfully offering and accepting feedback can help create strong relationships among team members, and between team members and you. Actively seek feedback whenever opportunities present themselves.

Actively elicit feedback throughout the day. Try asking after a conversation:

"How did this conversation feel for you?"
"Do you feel like I am understanding you properly?"
"Is there anything I am missing or didn't ask about that would be important for me to know?"

These questions can help demonstrate the value you place on feedback from team members.

Notes:

Provide Feedback

Creating open dialogue and trust between you and your team members is important. As a leader, however, sometimes you are required to give negative feedback. You may worry about how the person receiving the feedback will feel or react.

Reflect on when you need to provide negative feedback. Complete the following sentences:

I find giving negative feedback to others difficult because…

_____

_____

When I am providing negative feedback, I feel…

_____

_____

I worry that others will react by…

_____

_____

I worry that others will think I am…

_____

_____

Now, think about actual recent situations where you have provided negative feedback.

How often did others react the way you expected them to?

Has there been any ongoing evidence that those individuals think or feel about you the way that you thought they would?

When next providing negative feedback, remind yourself that your worst worries or fears about a situation rarely, if ever, come true and remind yourself what the most likely outcome will be.

When leaders give feedback that involves identifying weaknesses or mistakes, there is a risk of team members becoming defensive and unmotivated. This can be difficult both for the person giving the feedback, and the person receiving it.

There are a number of strategies that can help leaders provide negative feedback in a respectful, helpful and effective manner.

- Begin with a clear statement of the preferred outcome. This can sometimes eliminate the need for negative criticism altogether, as you work toward how the preferred outcome might be achieved.
- Acknowledge the team member's efforts, and emphasize that they are a valued member of your team/organization.
- Acknowledge the individual's strengths as well as providing performance feedback.
- Make feedback specific to behaviours, not to the individual's characteristics or personality.
- Provide clear, concrete examples of workplace behaviours that need to be addressed.
- Give the team member a chance to respond to your feedback.
- Where appropriate, frame the feedback process as an opportunity for professional growth.
- Keep in mind that most, if not all, team members will be emotionally triggered by criticism; don't take this personally.

Provide Feedback

Here are examples of less effective versus more effective ways of giving feedback.

SITUATION	LESS EFFECTIVE	MORE EFFECTIVE
A team member leaves a crucial part out of a proposal. You are surprised, as you had talked about the importance of following a set template for proposals with him.	You blame the team member for mistakes made, assuming he was being lazy or oppositional. *"Take it back and do it in the way we discussed. When I said we needed to include this part, I meant it."*	Give the team member the benefit of the doubt and don't assume negative intentions. *"We need all proposals to consistently use this template. I've noticed that you tend to prepare the proposals in a different template. Is there a reason for this?"*
You are asking a team member to stop making irrelevant comments during meetings.	You show that you're frustrated and tell the team member to stop their behavior, but you don't explain why. You provide no opportunity for the person to understand exactly what's wrong. *"Could you not ask these kinds of questions during our meetings? It's annoying."*	Be specific about the issue, state the consequence and explain the reason it's a problem. *"I need our meetings to stay focused on the agenda and to be productive. When a comment like that is made in meetings, it can sometimes lead to unproductive conversations, which we want to avoid because we only get one hour for every meeting."*
You are critiquing a team member's written work.	Your feedback is vague. You assume that the team member can guess what you want. *"This isn't really what I was after. Please change it."*	Feedback should clearly convey your desired outcomes. *"I'd like you to emphasize x and y and take out z, because it's not the focus of this report."*
A member of your team misunderstands what she was supposed to do for her part of the project, and does something different.	Your criticisms are harsh and inconsiderate. *"What were you thinking, doing this task using this method? You should know better!"*	Try to be understanding of the team member. *"I can see why you might think that this method applies to this problem, but actually…"*

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Provide Feedback

SITUATION	LESS EFFECTIVE	MORE EFFECTIVE
A team member has been on the job for three months, and you've noticed that she does some things poorly. You'd like her to improve her performance.	You want to tell her just how incompetent you think she is, so you criticize her the moment you see her next. *"You know, you've been here for three months already. You should be able to do x, y, z by now."*	Set up a meeting. Talk in privacy to demonstrate respect. Frame the feedback as an opportunity for growth. *"As your leader, I have the responsibility to help all my staff meet their performance standards which are x, y, z. I've noticed that you do x very well, so I'd like you to keep up the good work. Where you need some improvement is doing y more…"*
A team member is often late for work. You initially give him the benefit of the doubt, but you are becoming concerned and frustrated. You are beginning to think he's an irresponsible person.	You criticize the team member's character. *"I thought that since you're a father of two, you'd be more responsible, seeing as how you have to set a good example for your kids."*	Point out the behaviour and give specifics. *"I noticed you're arriving late about three days out of the week. I know you stay late to make up the time, but that's a problem because we need you to open the counter."*

Constructive feedback sounds considerably more positive to the listener. It generally can help team members be motivated to accept feedback. When comments are negative in tone and sound more like scolding than guiding, team members can feel disrespected and may be less likely to change their behaviour. Maintaining a constructive approach with team members and requiring them to do the same with each other can help you build mutually respectful working relationships.

Notes:

Positive Feedback

The great thing about being a leader responsible for a team is that the opportunities to provide positive feedback usually outnumber the negative. One of a leader's most effective tools for combating negative emotions and reactions in the workplace can be to enhance positive emotions. This can be accomplished through direct and indirect communication with team members.

Speaking personally with individual team members and expressing your respect and appreciation for them and their work is a powerful way to build morale. Less commonly considered are the benefits of taking an indirect approach and spreading positive talk about a team member to other team members.

Some ways for leaders to help increase positive emotions and reactions in the workplace include:

• Positive feedback – tell them what they have done well
• Praise – celebrate accomplishments
• Inspiration – share how your team members have inspired you
• Recognition of individual and team efforts – especially public acknowledgement
• Knowledge sharing – ask team members to share what they know
• Shared appreciation for goals – have each member talk about their contribution
• Encouragement of creativity – talk about innovation and taking risks

Lead by example and encourage team members to also look for opportunities to provide positive feedback to their colleagues.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Building Stronger Teams

Chapter 5

Team-Building Activities

As leaders, we are only as strong as the teams we build, and sustaining an effective team is an ongoing effort. The intention of these activities is to help build team resilience over time. The activities were developed by experts in the areas of trauma, resilience and emotional intelligence. They can be included as part of scheduled team meetings rather than requiring separate meetings each time you want to do an activity.

Each activity should take 30 minutes or less for a team of about 12 people.

Use these activities to help improve team effectiveness, increase self-awareness, foster civility and respect, build emotional intelligence, or develop mindfulness. This can help team members respond more effectively to pressures or stressors at work, resolve workplace issues and support each other through challenging times. Choose the activities that you as a leader feel most comfortable with, and those that you feel will benefit your team in the following areas:

• Team Effectiveness
• Civility and Respect
• Self-awareness
• Emotional Intelligence
• Mindfulness.

If you would like to improve your ability to lead team discussions, you may want to review Facilitating Team Discussions in Addendum B.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Chapter 6

Team Effectiveness

The ability to share and learn from the experiences of others is an efficient way to improve team effectiveness as well as individual performance.

The following activities provide strategies and opportunities for sharing information in ways that can benefit the entire team:

Team Huddle
Increase team effectiveness and build team resilience by acknowledging team members' wins and supporting one another's challenges.

Good Enough vs. Perfection
Develop shared and reasonable expectations in terms of quality of work.

Mistake Meetings
Develop a sense of openness and trust amongst the team.

Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles
Help team members focus on solutions and strategies they can use to overcome obstacles they may perceive are in the way of achieving their goals.

Identifying Workplace Risks
Engage the team in reviewing how they handled past stressful work situations, and what they learned, to develop strategies for the future.

Learning from the Past
Draw on past experiences to develop awareness of personal coping strategies.

Dealing with Disappointment
Ask team members to consider how they faced and moved beyond a work-related disappointment.

Numerous studies show that team members are more creative and are able to achieve higher levels of job performance when they are in healthy psychosocial work environments. A meta-analysis of 57 studies in this area confirmed that the quality of a team member's relationship with their supervisor, a sense of psychological empowerment, and a supportive culture and leadership contribute to job performance.

(Lowe, G., 2014. The Wellness Dividend: How Employers Can Improve Employee Health and Productivity. The Graham Lowe Group. http://creatinghealthyorganizations.ca/Documents/Wellness Dividend Report-April2014.pdf)

Team Huddle

Learning objective:

This team-building activity can increase team effectiveness and can help build team resilience through celebrating wins and providing support for challenges.

Time required:

Approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Flip chart and marker (optional)

Instructions:

This activity may help save time spent in regular team meetings, as it is more frequent, but much shorter in duration and more focused on tactical issues. It can also help:

- *Foster positive workplace culture*
- *Identify potential issues early*
- *Identify and remove health and safety risks for employees, clients or customers*
- *Increase sense of self-responsibility in employees*
- *Increase employee engagement*
- *Prepare the team to be better at responding in an emergency*
- *Develop instant/timely communication skills*
- *Provide an automatic triage of team priorities for the day.*

The group should consist of those who work together or whose work is dependent on each other. For groups larger than 20 people, consider breaking the group into smaller teams of about 10 members each. Bring the group together daily or weekly for a team huddle to discuss successes and challenges.

If possible, participants in this activity should be standing rather than sitting. This activity is best conducted at the beginning of the day or shift. For 24-7 organizations, you can do this as a way of building shift continuity, and connecting the outgoing and incoming shifts though sharing of successes.

No meeting minutes need be taken, but the facilitator can use a flip chart or whiteboard to record and highlight action items. If you think it will improve team comfort, you can offer to go first.

Suggested wording:

I'd like everyone to stand up (if you're able to) for this activity. We're going to go around the circle and share an example of at least one win we've had since our last huddle. We'll talk about that in relation to what has been working well for each of us (it can be technology, flexibility, co-worker support, new strategies, etc.), and then we'll explore whether anyone needs help with a particular challenge they're facing.

So first:

1. Name one win or success you've had at work since we last met. What success of yours can we celebrate today?

Then:

2. What has been working well for you?

Instructions:

Each person, one by one, around the circle answers these two questions. Then the full group discusses the next two questions about needing help. Not everyone will have something to offer for the questions about needing help.

Suggested wording:

1. Who needs any help today or would like to discuss a challenge?
2. Who is in a place to be able to assist or support others? (This can be those with a lighter load or someone with specific knowledge or skills that can help with a challenge.)

Instructions:

The facilitator can look out for the successes and lessons learned, and highlight them with leadership. You may also want to consider some additional strategies:

- *If someone has not participated in a few days, encourage them to do so.*
- *Ask the team to report on positive feedback received from clients, patients, or customers.*
- *If one individual or question requires more time than was planned for, end the huddle on time and then pick up where you left off the next day/week, or meet with the individual privately. The huddle should be a continual, quick process.*
- *Depending on the team or organization, the facilitator may want to end the meeting with notes on key priorities for the day.*

Activity developed with help from: Lisa Doulas, TEND; Deborah Connors, Well-Advised Consulting Inc.; Graham Lowe, The Graham Lowe Group; Catherine Morisset, Imagine Plus.

Notes:

Good Enough vs. Perfection

Learning objective:

This team-building activity can help develop shared and reasonable expectations in terms of quality of work.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:

Facilitate a discussion with your team about the concept of "perfection" vs. "good enough". It may be helpful to identify a specific project or process you wish to feature as the topic for the discussion.

As you start the discussion, be aware of differences. For example, some people strive for perfect results and value quality of work over speed. Other people value speed or quantity of work completed as a standard of success. Both are relevant and valuable when a reasonable balance is achieved. When these two types of employees work together and have rigid or extreme expectations, they may experience stress because of their different values and styles.

You may also wish to assign a note taker, so you can share the discussion points with the group after the meeting. Facilitate the discussion according to the steps in the order shown below.

Suggested wording:

Although we talk about striving for excellence, it is important to distinguish when "good enough" is, *well*, good enough. It is not a realistic strategy to demand perfection 100 per cent of the time, and doing so can actually result in missing deadlines, hiding errors, or causing unnecessary stress.

Today we will look at *[identify one of your existing tasks, processes or projects]* and determine when good enough is acceptable and where excellence is necessary. I know that we may not all agree, but the goal of this conversation is to make a team decision that can help relieve stress due to unnecessary pressure.

1. First, let's identify the major tasks of the project or process.
2. Next, let's consider where a higher level of quality or attention to detail is necessary, and why.
3. Now, let's consider the tasks where good enough is actually good enough, and how we would measure good enough.
4. What other stressors are related to this particular work?
5. Are there other ways we can manage or reduce stress while maintaining our ability to get the job done?

We've agreed on what must meet our highest standards and when good enough is still delivering an acceptable level of quality or performance.

It's also helpful to be aware of the pressure for those who strive to achieve an absolute perfect quality of work, and the stress that they experience in working with those who do not share the same values. Constantly striving for perfection may cause stress that just isn't warranted.

On the other hand, those who feel judged or slowed down by unreasonable expectations of perfection can also feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Working hard is rarely the problem, but working under extreme pressure can be stressful. If we clarify what is reasonable and expected, we can help manage our workload better, reduce our own stress, and improve productivity.

Instructions:

Following the meeting, distribute the recorded notes to the group.

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Mistake Meetings

Learning objective: This team-building activity can help develop a sense of openness and trust amongst the team.

Time required: Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:
In a workplace where mistakes are concealed for fear of reprisal, hidden problems can become dangerous or costly. The goal of this activity is to imagine and work toward a workplace where mistakes are seen as part of learning, and solutions are shared among team members to prevent the same mistake from being repeated.

As a leader, you can set the tone by sharing one or more mistakes that you have made since the last meeting. Follow up by sharing how you corrected the mistake, or use this opportunity to ask for ideas to problem solve the situation. (If you think your team or workplace will react strongly to the word "mistake", you can ask them to share a "challenge" instead; the intent would be the same.)

Ask the participants to be sure to have at least one mistake to share for this meeting. They can either share what they did to correct it or ask for help to solve a problem. Set the ground rules up front by stating that it's not the intention to belittle or ridicule anyone for the mistake they choose to share.

In some workplaces, team members may be reluctant at first, but if you can be forthcoming in sharing your mistakes, over time this process can encourage people to be open about mistakes rather than trying to hide them. It also provides an opportunity for the team to help each other improve the quality of their work.

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Notes:

Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps team members focus on solutions and strategies they can use to overcome obstacles they may perceive as being in the way of achieving their goals.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials:

Flip chart and markers

Instructions:

Choose an existing goal or objective that you feel your team can relate to – project or time management, reaching quotas, facilitating regular team meetings, improving communication, planning social events, less stress or conflict, etc. It can be beneficial to choose the topic in advance of the meeting and let the team know what you'll be talking about.

Once you've decided on your goal or objective, record it below in the Suggested wording.

Present the following series of questions, one at a time, to explore the process and reach the desired outcome. Restate the purpose of the meeting and invite discussion for each question.

Let the group know that this is a team-building activity to help build problem solving and communication skills amongst the team, rather than a formal project meeting, so they can relax and benefit from the learning.

Suggested wording:

Our goal today is to explore a problem solving method as a team.

• The goal or objective I want us to focus on for today is:

_____ .

Ask the group to state positively and specifically what we want the desired outcome(s) to be.

• How will we know when we have reached the desired outcome(s)? What will we see, hear and feel?
• How would a third-party observer be able to tell that we have reached the outcome(s) we wanted? (What would they see or hear?)
• What will reaching this outcome(s) do for our team?
• What stops us from reaching it now? *(Follow up with "What else?" until the team can go no further.)*
• What are we willing to do in order to reach our desired outcome(s)?
• What are we willing to stop doing in order to reach our desired outcome?
• Is there something we have been doing that is preventing us from reaching the desired outcome(s)?

Wrap up by asking the team whether the discussions have helped them explore or improve the ability to reach the goal or objective, and whether they could apply this process to achieving other goals or objectives in the workplace.

Activity developed with help from: *Deri Latimer, Positivity Speaking.*

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

Identifying Workplace Risks

Learning objective:

This team-building activity engages the team in reviewing past stressful work situations to develop strategies to cope with future stressful work situations.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:

In a team discussion, ask team members to:

1. *Consider a stressful workplace situation they have dealt with in the past.*
2. *Rate their level of predictability of the past situation (the extent to which they expected it would happen as it did), from zero to 10.*
3. *Rate their level of control over the situation as it was happening, from zero to 10.*

Ask team members to share their responses. You can consider going first to break the ice.

Once there has been some discussion, ask a couple of team members if they would be willing to answer a few more questions about how they responded. Write down some of the ideas that are shared.

Suggested wording:

- What were the things you did right in this situation?
- What did you contribute to the resolution of this situation?
- What lessons were learned, or how did you grow from this situation?

Instructions:

After team members have responded, share with the group that managing stressful workplace situations is more difficult when we don't anticipate or predict that the event could occur, or when we have a lack of control over the outcome.

Ask if anyone wants to share a strategy they will use as a result of the discussion. If there's no immediate response, share some of the ideas you had noted from the previous questions. After some discussion, provide the brief wrap-up below.

Suggested wording:

By reviewing what happens in stressful situations and considering how to prepare for future situations, we can help build our personal resilience as well as our strategic approaches to problem solving.

Thank you for your ideas. Hopefully we all have some new strategies we can draw on to help reduce the stress of situations where in the past, we felt we had little or no control.

Activity developed with help from: *Dr. Joti Samra, R.Psych.*

Notes:

Learning from the Past

Learning objective:

This team-building activity can help develop awareness of personal coping strategies.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Handout or email with a list of questions, to be distributed in advance of meeting.

Instructions:

In advance of the meeting, send an email or memo asking team members to consider a challenging work stressor they've dealt with in the past and to reflect on the list of questions (see below).

At the beginning of the meeting, help put everyone at ease by letting them know that they are only being asked to contribute what they are comfortable sharing regarding a work-related challenge they may have faced in the past.

Be the first one to share your example and answers. You can then ask for volunteers to share theirs. It may be most effective to go through the list of questions with each person rather than jumping from person to person. Get everyone to contribute and allow as many people as possible to share within the meeting timeframe.

As individuals are speaking, take the opportunity to prompt them to consider the coping strategies they may have used.

Suggested wording:

Most of us will face a range of work-related stressors. This is an inevitable part of working life. We can likely deal with stressors more effectively if we have appropriate personal or social supports around us. In preparation for the meeting today, I asked you to consider a challenging work stressor you dealt with in the past. I will share my example and then each of you can share yours. The questions were:

• What helped you effectively navigate different aspects of the stressful situation?
• What were the personal coping strategies you used? (Going for a walk, talking to someone, deep breathing, etc.)
• What supports did you access or use (personal and at work)? (EAP, co-worker, etc.)
• Were there other supports available that you could or should have accessed or used?
• How can you use this information to assist you or others when facing a stressful situation in the future?

Identifying and evaluating what has helped in the past can help us be more effective in managing future stressors. The discussion today can help us become more aware of the variety of strategies that others have used that may assist us in coping.

Activity developed with help from: *Dr. Joti Samra, R.Psych.*

Dealing with Disappointment

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps team members develop skills to move beyond a disappointment.

Time required:

Approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:

Provide the brief introduction below and then ask team members to do the activity outlined. Note: Three years is usually enough time to have gained insight about a past disappointment. A more recent disappointment may not work for this activity. **If someone in your group was recently passed over for a promotion, the suggested wording below should be modified** *to a less personally painful example, such as a business closing down or some other disappointment.*

Ask each person to jot down a few notes so that they know which event in their lives they are referring to. If someone cannot think of an example, allow them to pass. Once they have written down the event, ask them to write their responses to the two questions below.

Suggested wording:

Imagine working hard for many years, maybe your whole career, in the same job and then a promotion becomes available. You feel this is finally your chance to move forward. Your co-workers seemingly all believe you deserve it and are behind you. And then you don't get the promotion.

It can be devastating.

What I'd like you to do now is recall a work-related disappointment from at least three years ago. It could be while working here or at a previous job. It could be a door that closed or an opportunity denied. It could be a project that was not successful or a plan that was shelved.

Next take a moment to write your answers to the following two questions, which I'll ask you to share.

1. What opportunities were eventually made possible after the disappointment?
2. How did the disappointment help you grow, develop or change?

Share your personal response and then ask for volunteers to share theirs. After everyone who wants to share has done so, move on to the following wrap up.

Suggested wording:

Often what seems like a defeat in life can actually be a stepping-stone to something else. In the example shared about not getting a promotion, the individual decided to look for another job and ended up in a new and exciting career. Looking back, he realized that, had he been given the promotion, he would have stayed where he was and missed out on this amazing opportunity.

Understanding what good can come from a disappointment may not make it easier in the moment, but it can help us to gain perspective and put it behind us faster.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Chapter 7

Civility and Respect

When team members don't feel safe speaking up or don't know how to do so respectfully, it can cause high levels of stress and dysfunction within the team.

The activities in this section help to improve civility and respect among team members:

Specific Active Acknowledgement
Help the team develop skills to respond and acknowledge one another in specific and active ways.

Volunteering Together
Build team resilience through a shared sense of making a difference.

Practicing Non-Judgmental Interpretations
Have team members consider more constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours.

Acknowledging Strengths
Have team members think and talk about the strengths that others bring to the team.

Acknowledging our Accomplishments
Provide an opportunity for team members to share positive contributions they have made that may not have been recognized by you or others.

Commitment by all levels of management to a respectful culture and to WHP [workplace health promotion] programmes was a motivating factor for employees to participate in the programmes and model the respectful characteristics. Where management support was lacking or different levels of management displayed differing commitment to WHP the employees felt less motivated to participate in WHP programmes.

Dickson-Swift, V., Fox, C., Marshall, K., Welch, N., Wills, J., 2014. What really improves employee health and wellbeing – Findings from regional Australian workplaces.

Specific Active Acknowledgement

Learning objective:

This team-building activity is focused on improving the way we acknowledge and respond to others.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Printed copies of the three levels of acknowledgement or a flip chart to post them on.

Instructions:

Before the session, create handouts documenting the three levels of acknowledgement (see below), or write them on a flipchart or board for everyone to see.

Here are three levels of acknowledgement:

1. ***Acknowledgement*** *– May be a simple nod or "Good for you" without any significant show of emotion or engagement.*
2. ***Active acknowledgment*** *– Includes more energy and attention, e.g. looking the person in the eyes, being more enthusiastic in your response: "Wow! That's great!"*
3. ***Specific, active acknowledgement*** *– Descriptive, meaningful and focused. Includes details about why you appreciate something about the person, or what the other person said or did. It also includes a description of positive impact. Importantly, it also includes engaging the other person in discussion about what you are acknowledging them for: "You got the promotion! Allowing yourself to open up to new possibilities has really paid off. What does this mean for you?"*

Suggested wording:

If a team member were to describe being very pleased because an idea for a new project had been well received, the person would likely appreciate your positive feedback. A specific, active acknowledgement would be to offer congratulations and ask for details about how it had happened, using open-ended questions while giving your full attention as they respond. You would maintain eye contact during the conversation and display a genuine positive reaction.

Let's pick an example of someone successfully completing a drive to benefit a local food bank. I want you to consider how you would respond, using each of the three forms of acknowledgement explained earlier: acknowledgement, active acknowledgement and specific, active acknowledgement. Take a few minutes to think of an answer for each one and I'll ask for some volunteers.

Examples of words that describe the approach to specific, active acknowledging:

• Enthusiasm
• Energy
• Focus on the other person
• Collaboration
• Openness
• Hopefulness
• Conscientiousness
• Supportiveness

Instructions:

Following are some examples of how someone might respond for each level:

Acknowledgement: "Good job."
Active acknowledgement: "That's great. I'm so glad we can help people."
Specific active acknowledgement: "What fantastic news! Your enthusiasm carried us all through to this success. How do you feel about it?"

Less positive responses:

- *"That's good. I'm sure the bosses will be pleased with you."*
- *"Was that really such a good idea? Maybe the company could be giving us all bonuses instead?"*

Once team members have contributed some ideas, open a discussion about how the way they interact and communicate with each other can contribute to a more energized, civil and respectful work environment.

Conclude the session by sharing that this type of interaction may not always be practical due to time constraints, but when you can respond in a way that is specific and active, it can help build both team culture and social support. When you recognize someone responding in this way, you can acknowledge it by saying, "Thank you for your interest and encouragement."

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Notes:

Volunteering Together

Learning objective:

This team-building activity can help build resiliency through improved social support and self-efficacy.

Time required:

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size (plus the time spent on the actual volunteering project).

Instructions:

Have the team choose a project that everyone can take part in: volunteering at a soup kitchen, holding a charitable or fundraising event, sponsoring a child, etc.

Provide reasonable time to complete the project as a group.

Once the event is over, ask the team to share what they got out of the experience. Ask the group to consider if there is another event they may wish to participate in.

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Notes:

Practicing Non-Judgmental Interpretations

Learning objective:

This activity assists team members in developing constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours.

Time required:

Approximately 20 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the activity, write the following sentences on the flip chart, leaving space beneath or around to re-write the sentences (if there is anyone in your group with one of these names, use a different name):

- *"Tim's always upset with co-workers because he's a jerk."*
- *"Nicole is always on the verge of tears because she's such a softie."*
- *"Danielle is always anxious when there are tight deadlines because she's not cut out for her position."*

Suggested wording:

When we interact with a distressed employee, it is natural to try to understand what is motivating their negative emotions and reactions. We can often be quite accurate when ascertaining the causes of and contributors to other people's *positive* emotion states. One of the traps we may fall into, however, when dealing with negative emotions in the workplace, is making simplistic and judgmental interpretations, such as:

> *"Tim's always upset with co-workers because he's a jerk."*
> *"Nicole is always on the verge of tears because she's such a softie."*
> *"Danielle is always anxious when there are tight deadlines because she's not cut out for her position."*

Judgmental interpretations are often wrong, and almost always completely unhelpful. Taking the time to develop a non-judgmental understanding of employees, their behaviours, and their reactions to situations is critical to supporting them effectively.

Instructions:

> 1. *Refer to the three sentences that have been written on the flip chart:*
>   a. *Tim's always upset with co-workers because he's a jerk.*
>   b. *Nicole is always on the verge of tears because she's such a softie.*
>   c. *Danielle is always anxious when there are tight deadlines because she's not cut out for her position.*
> 2. *Ask team members to discuss why these statements are judgmental interpretations.*
> 3. *Ask them to think of ways to reword these statements so they are objective or factual instead of judgmental. Record some of the group's favourite suggestions on the flip sheet in the free space around the sentences.*

To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to spend the next day noticing judgments and assumptions in the workplace. Have team members differentiate their thoughts between objective or factual vs. assumptions or judgments. Team members are to work on translating their judgmental thoughts into objective descriptions.

Suggested wording:

Spend a day noticing your thoughts, assumptions and judgments about others. Be aware of how many of these thoughts are objective or factual (e.g., "Tim is speaking to his co-worker in a loud voice") versus how many are based on subjective or unfounded assumptions or judgments (e.g., "Tim is a jerk").

What percentage of your thoughts were objective/factual versus judgmental? Actively work on catching yourself when you have judgmental thoughts, and translating them into objective, factual descriptions. This can be important in helping you develop constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours. This process takes time and practice, but will eventually start to feel natural.

Notes:

Acknowledging Strengths

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps team members think about and articulate the strengths that others bring to the team.

Time required:

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Blank pieces of paper, one for each person.

Instructions:

Provide advance notice to team members that you will be doing a team-building activity that will include having each team member share what they value in their co-workers in one sentence or less. (This activity is not recommended for a dysfunctional team. It is intended for an average or good team that may want to improve cohesion.)

1. *At the meeting, provide blank pieces of paper to all team members.*
2. *Ask each team member to write their name in the center of the sheet.*
3. *Then ask them to circulate their paper to the person to their left.*
4. *Ask team members to write about a work-related strength or characteristic they value in the team member whose name is on the sheet. Length is no more than one sentence and as little as one word.*
   No one is to sign their name to what they write.
5. *Circulate the sheets of paper around until the one with their own name on it arrives back to each person.*
6. *Ask each person to add one thing they value about themselves as a team member.*
7. *Once everyone is done, ask each participant to share any one item from their sheet.*

If someone would rather pass, allow this.

The objective is to improve each team member's ability to acknowledge the strengths of others, and to become aware of the characteristics others value in them. The effect on a person of seeing the strengths others attribute to them can be quite motivating.

To wrap up, you can instruct people to take their sheet with them and be aware of how they might continue to look for characteristics they value in others. Let them know you may do this activity again in a few months.

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Notes:

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Acknowledging our Accomplishments

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps recognize positive accomplishments that may not otherwise have been acknowledged.

Time required:

About 15-20 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:

Often leaders aren't aware of the "wins" or "successes" of their employees on a day-to-day basis. Having employees write down something they are proud of accomplishing at work can be a very quick sharing activity at a meeting. Alternatively you may ask employees to do this for themselves daily or weekly, and share they have written with you at their next one-on-one meeting or performance review.

Suggested wording:

Take a moment and write down one positive contribution you made in the past week or so at work.

It can be something big or small. Please be creative in coming up with something you are most proud of, but recognize that some weeks, just showing up to a meeting or getting to work on time could be considered your "good thing". Other contributions could include helping a co-worker, organizing your desk, or completing a task.

Once you have had a moment to write something down, we will have volunteers share one of their accomplishments.

Instructions:

It's important for leaders to acknowledge all contributions in a way that is positive and focused on supporting the team member's ongoing success. Some people may be too shy to share and that's OK. Just writing it down can provide a sense of accomplishment, and you can ask the employee to share privately with you during one-on-one meetings or at performance review time.

Activity developed with help from: *Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.*

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Chapter 8

Self-awareness

The more we learn about ourselves, the more tolerant and respectful we can be of others. This is because when we are able to accept our flaws as well as our strengths, we are less likely to hold others to impossible standards. In addition, when we learn about how different values and perspectives can contribute to the success of an entire team, we learn to appreciate differences.

The following activities can help team members improve self-awareness:

Identifying Your Interaction Style
Have team members think about interaction styles when under stress to help develop more effective behaviour.

Identifying Your Values
Articulate core values to identify goals and understand behaviours.

Identifying Your Strengths
Think about specific ways to build strengths.

Matching Intent and Behaviour
Change external behaviour to better reflect intention.

Interpreting Negative Feedback Accurately
Interpret feedback more accurately by avoiding assumptions about the intent.

Reacting to Change
Develop awareness of how we react to change.

> **…supervisors who over-rated their own performance behaviors reported the lowest levels of Civility and Psychological Safety…however, supervisors that under-rated their own performance reported the highest levels of burnout, highlighting the importance of self-awareness (accurately rating oneself) in relation to individual and group outcomes.**
>
> *(Hernandez, W., Luthanen, A., Ramsel, D., Osatuke, K., 2015. The mediating relationship of self-awareness on supervisor burnout and workgroup Civility & Psychological Safety: A multilevel path analysis. ScienceDirect*
>
> *(http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221305861520023X)*

Identifying Your Interaction Style

Learning objective:

This team activity allows team members to think about their interaction styles when under stress.

Time required:

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

When team members are required to copy and complete questions, it may be beneficial to use the flip chart and markers to copy out these items ahead of time.

Write these three behaviours on the flip chart:

> **Passive behaviour** – not standing up for your rights; not expressing your ideas/feelings
> **Aggressive behaviour** – expressing your ideas/feelings without allowing others to do the same; getting your way at the unfair expense of others
> **Passive-aggressive behaviour** – communicating a hostile/unkind message through non-verbal behaviours such as eye-rolling, gesturing or ignoring others; giving deliberately frustrating verbal responses

Suggested wording:

When placed in stressful or taxing workplace situations, we can sometimes gravitate toward certain "default" styles of interacting with others. Even the calmest and most assertive individuals may find that certain situations or circumstances can prompt them to use an unhelpful interaction style. This can threaten a team's effectiveness, because it is particularly important in stressful situations for team members to use their communication skills to their fullest.

Instructions:

1. *Have team members copy the three different behaviours onto their papers.*
2. *Ask team members to think about their default interaction style when under stress. Ask team members to list/ describe the types of workplace situations that may trigger each of the behaviours for them on their paper.*
3. *After team members have finished writing situations for each behaviour, invite team members to share and discuss their findings.*

To wrap up, discuss and reflect as a group what team members can do in stressful situations to engage in an assertive communication style.

Suggested wording:

Reflect on what you can do in stressful situations to actively remind yourself to engage in an assertive communication style (one where you express your needs in a clear, open, non-defensive and respectful manner, and also allow others to express their needs).

Identifying Your Values

Learning objective:

This team activity helps team members to articulate core values to identify goals and understand behaviours.

Time required:

Approximately 40 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

One-page Identifying Your Values handout (on following page), writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the meeting, print each team member a copy of the worksheet on the next page.

Suggested wording:

Our values impact all facets of our lives and the many roles we play (e.g., friend, partner, parent, employee, manager). Values shape the goals that are important to us, our behaviours, and the manner in which we interact with others. Values change over the course of our lifetimes, and may even differ between our various roles and responsibilities. The priorities we place on different values also vary over time.

It can be helpful to identify the workplace values that are important to you today, and to contemplate how they relate to your goals as a team member. Articulating your core values can help you to identify your goals and understand your behaviours. It can also serve as a valuable frame of reference for those inevitable times when you may begin to slip away from the values you hold dear.

Instructions:

1. *Have team members refer to their copy of the worksheet that you have handed out.*
2. *Ask team members to read through the values and circle those that are most important to them at this moment.*
3. *In the second column, ask them to explain why they value this in their role in the workplace (they should be specific).*
4. *After team members have completed their sheets, invite discussion and reflection about these values.*
5. *Have team members place an asterisk (*) next to any values they would like to develop or strengthen even further.*
6. *Ask team members to think about specific ways that they can work on building these different values and list 3-5 ways for how they will achieve this.*
7. *Invite team members to share and discuss their plans.*

To wrap up, have team members commit to actively working to enhance their chosen values. Ask them to write down a time period within which they will complete their task. At the end of their chosen time period, they should reflect on their commitment to enhancing their values and any future steps they may wish to take.

Identifying Your Values

Read through the following values and circle those that are most important to you at the present moment.
For each of the values you circle, identify why it is important to you in your current role.

Value	I value this in my role because...
Acceptance	
Accuracy	
Achievement	
Authority	
Autonomy	
Caring	
Challenge	
Comfort	
Commitment	
Compassion	
Contribution	
Cooperation	
Courtesy	
Creativity	
Dependability	
Duty	
Family	
Flexibility	
Forgiveness	
Friendship	
Fun	
Genuineness	
Growth	
Honesty	
Humour	
Independence	
Industry	
Justice	
Knowledge	
Mastery	
Openness	
Order	
Power	
Purpose	
Rationality	
Responsibility	
Safety	
Self-control	
Stability	
Tolerance	

Identifying Your Strengths

Learning objective:

This activity helps team members to identify and think about specific ways to build their strengths.

Time required:

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on the group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

1. *Copy the chart below on the flip chart in advance of the meeting.*
2. *Have team members copy the following chart onto their own pieces of paper:*

My Top Five Strengths as a Team Member	How My Strengths Enhance My Performance
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

3. *Instruct team members to list their five strongest attributes as a team member in the first column.*
4. *In the second column, ask team members to describe how these strengths help them perform well in their job (they should be specific).*
5. *Once team members have completed their charts, invite team members to share and discuss their findings.*
6. *After a brief discussion, ask team members to put an asterisk (*) next to one strength that they think helps them most in their work, and that they would like to build even further.*
7. *Below their charts, have team members copy and complete the following sentences:*
   a. *I would like to further strengthen…*
   b. *This is important to me because…*
   c. *Building upon this strength will help me in my work by…*
8. *Ask team members to think about specific ways that they can work on building this strength and to list three things they can do to achieve this.*
9. *Have team members copy and complete the sentence:*
   I will know I am successful when…
10. *Invite team members to share and discuss their plans.*

To wrap up, have team members commit to actively working to enhance their chosen strength. Have them create a time period for which they will complete their task. At the end of their chosen time period, they should reflect on their commitment to enhancing their strength and any future steps they may wish to take.

Matching Intent and Behaviour

Learning objective:

This activity helps team members consider how their external behaviour can better reflect internal intent.

Time required:

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the meeting, copy the bolded sentences below onto the flip chart.

Suggested wording:

Communication and interaction in the workplace is complex and demanding, and it requires considerable energy to maintain a standard that reflects our goals. We may have the best intentions in our minds, but our behaviour is not quite able to keep up.

Team members often find they disagree with the way they are described by their co-workers. This may be because there is a discrepancy between their **internal intent** and **external behaviour**. In other words, their thoughts and actions don't match.

Instructions:

1. *Have team members think back to times when they have been described in ways with which they disagree. Ask them to write down those words/descriptions on their paper.*
2. *Have team members copy the following sentence on their paper:*
   When I come across as _____, I am actually intending to communicate _____.
3. *Have team members complete the above sentence with each of the words/descriptions they had previously listed.*
4. *Once everyone has finished, invite discussion and reflection from the team members.*
5. *Instruct team members to make a plan for changing their external behaviour to better reflect their true intent. Have team members copy and complete the following sentence:*
   I will be mindful of my external behaviour by specifically doing the following: _____.
6. *Invite discussion and reflection from team members.*

To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to take the time to think and reflect over how they can change their external behaviour in the future in order to match their intent.

Interpreting Negative Feedback Accurately

Learning objective:

This team activity helps team members to learn how to interpret feedback accurately by focusing on its constructive intent and keeping it in perspective.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the meeting, copy the chart below onto the flip chart.

Suggested wording:

Receiving negative feedback from anyone – whether it's a manager, an employee, a partner, a friend – is difficult for most of us, even in the best of times. This is understandable when we recognize that we all have a core need to perform well in the various roles we play, and to be liked and admired by others. Nevertheless, receiving negative feedback is unavoidable, especially in the workplace, and is important for helping you improve your performance. As such, we can all benefit from being more receptive to it. This begins with interpreting negative feedback accurately by focusing on its constructive intent and keeping it in perspective.

One of the main reasons negative feedback often feels bad is that we tend to make assumptions about what the other person is saying. It can be very helpful to train yourself to focus *specifically* and *only* on the words being said, without making assumptions about any possible hidden messages we think someone may be trying to convey.

For example, if your leader says something like, "*the quality of your last report was lower than what I am used to seeing from you*", it can be tempting to interpret this as, "*I am terrible at what I do*", or "*she is disappointed in me*", or "*I'm a failure*". Unfortunately, the assumptions we make tend to be overly negative, even catastrophic, and frequently inaccurate. We can easily take a comment on one slightly flawed report and blow it out of proportion into a comment on our overall ineffectiveness.

Instructions:

1. *Have team members copy and complete the chart headings below. Examples appear in italics and are up to your discretion whether to include in advance.*

Negative feedback I received (be specific)	From whom (describe situation)	Assumptions I made	A more accurate interpretation may be
Employees say they don't feel a real connection with me.	*From the regional manager during our one-on-one.*	*The employees don't like me, and the regional manager thinks I don't care about them.*	*The employees like me and would feel even more appreciated if I took more time to connect with them, and the regional manager knows I have good people skills and wants to make sure I put them to good use.*

2. Instruct team members to be as specific and detailed as possible when completing the chart. Have them try and come up with multiple scenarios.

Suggested wording:

Think of some negative feedback you have received in the workplace. Identify what was said and take note of any assumptions you made. Then rewrite those assumptions to more accurately reflect the actual situation.

3. Once team members' charts are complete, invite discussion and reflection from the team members.

To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to take the time to think and reflect on what is accurately being said the next time they receive negative feedback.

Suggested wording:

The next time you receive negative feedback, be aware of the assumptions you make. Try to actively catch the assumptions and reword them to more accurately reflect what is being said.

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Reacting to Change

Learning objective:

This team-building activity can help develop awareness of how we react to change.

Time required:

About 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:

Prior to the meeting, you may wish to personally review a change process/cycle model, to be familiar with basic steps and issues at each stage. An example is the SlideShare of William Bridges': Managing Transition.

Do not share in advance what this activity is about. At the meeting, once everyone has taken their seats, ask team members to get up and change chairs. Don't look them in the eye or give any explanation. If they ask, just say they must move to any seat other than the one they were in, and they should take their things with them.

Once everyone is re-seated, ask for volunteers to share what they felt or experienced during or after the request to change seats.

Suggested wording:

I want you to think about what you thought or felt when you were forced to change chairs. Having change thrust upon us with little or no explanation can be stressful. We may feel resentment, annoyance or something else.

OK, let's go around the room and each person share what they experienced when forced to change without knowing why.

Instructions:

You could link what the group shares to the various steps in William Bridges' change process/cycle model.

The purpose of this activity is to convey ideas to help team members manage change in the workplace. These may include the notions that:

- *Change is rarely straightforward. It is often complex and messy.*
- *Change can take time, and patience is important.*
- *Change can cause anxiety. It's important to share and demonstrate an understanding of our fears and concerns, to help reduce this anxiety.*
- *Sometimes it can be helpful to explore possibilities and take reasonable risks.*
- *We do not all react the same way to change.*

Suggested wording:

There are two things to consider here – we need to do our best to prepare people for change and explain the purpose of the change. The other is that we can be aware of our own stress related to change and take steps to seek clarity, in order to gain a better sense of control.

Activity developed with help from: *William Pallett, WJ Pallett & Associates.*

Chapter 9

Emotional Intelligence

The benefits of building emotional intelligence among team members in the workplace can be significant. This includes having greater capacity to adapt and cope with work and life stressors, making it easier to recover from challenges and setbacks.

The activities in this chapter can help team members become more aware of how their emotions impact their behaviour and how they might react to the emotions of others:

The Function of Emotions
Examine exactly what an emotional response may be communicating.

Emotional Triggers
Understand emotional triggers and how they may impact different situations.

Anger as a Symptom
Examine situations where anger is a "secondary emotion" of an underlying "primary emotion".

Expressing Anger Constructively
Express anger constructively to minimize problematic circumstances in the future.

Dealing with Worry
Reduce worry about work and replace it with effective problem solving.

Examining Emotionally Driven Decision-Making
Explore factors that may interfere with the ability to make optimal decisions.

Stimulating a supportive atmosphere among co-workers and developing relationship-oriented leadership styles should be embedded in health and safety policies.

(Bronkhorst, B., Tummers, L., Steijn, B., and Vijverberg, D., 2014. Organizational Climate and Employee Mental Health Outcomes – A Systematic Review of Studies in Health Care Organizations. Health Care Management Review, Volume 40 - Issue 3 - p 254–271)

The Function of Emotions

Learning objective:

This activity allows team members to examine different ranges of emotional responses and what functions they may serve.

Time required:

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the activity, write out the following sentences on the flip chart:

1. *Emotions **motivate** actions that are essential to our survival (e.g., a fight, flight or freeze response).*
2. *Emotions **communicate** to those in our environment that we are dealing with stressors and that we need support.*
3. *Emotions serve a **self-validating** function (i.e., they tell us that something important in our life is changing or is affected, and help us learn how to deal with recurrent stressors over time).*

Suggested wording:

Emotions – even those that feel unpleasant or seem negative – can serve several important functions. *Read the sentences on the flip chart out loud.*

People may find that they are less effective at work when they ignore their emotions. They may gain important information from examining exactly what an emotional response may be communicating to them. A team member, for example, may be surprised to find herself reacting angrily when invited to a special event. Upon further reflection, she may realize that the anger reaction is telling her she is overcommitted and should reconsider her work/life balance, at least temporarily.

Instructions:

1. *Ask team members to think of a time where they were **angry** at work and it served them well. Have team members write out the situation on their paper and include what function(s) this emotion served for them. Invite discussion and reflection from team members.*
2. *Ask team members to think of a time where they were **fearful** at work and it served them well. Have team members write out the situation on their paper and include what function(s) this emotion served for them. Invite discussion and reflection from team members.*
3. *Ask team members to think of a time where they were **sad (or hurt)** at work and it served them well. Have team members write out the situation on their paper and include what function(s) this emotion served for them. Invite discussion and reflection from team members.*

To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to take the time to think and reflect over how emotions, even negative ones, can serve a purpose.

Emotional Triggers

Learning objective:

This activity helps team members understand their own emotional triggers in order to help them plan ahead to more effectively address different situations.

Time required:

Approximately 40 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Two-page Emotional Triggers handout (on following pages, writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

In advance of the meeting, make copies of the worksheets on the next two pages and hand out to each team member.

Suggested wording:

We all have certain reactions that are more likely to trigger emotions for us. Most of us are relatively comfortable with encountering certain types of negative emotional states or behaviours, and quite uncomfortable with others (e.g., you may find it relatively easy to interact with someone who is sad and tearful, but find it nerve-wracking to deal with a hostile employee). Understanding your emotional triggers helps you plan ahead for how to address different situations.

Instructions:

1. *Go through the questions one at a time and invite team discussion after each question.*

2. *Share some of your own answers to start discussion if necessary.*

3. *For each question, use the flip chart to record some of the frequent triggers for easy reference in discussion, or any that group members have added that were not previously on the list.*

4. *To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to continue to reflect on their own emotional triggers in order to help them plan ahead for how to address different situations.*

Emotional Triggers

1. What are some of your emotional triggers? Choose from among the following list or add your own.

Passive-aggressive behaviour	Criticizing/judging
Whining	Frustration/irritation
Crying	Worry/nervousness
Blaming	Anger
Victim mentality	Disappointment
Aggression	Sadness
Hostility	Unhappiness
Need to please	Sarcasm
Silent treatment	High-strung temperament
Manipulation	Arrogance
Deceit/lying	Conceitedness
Dislike	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Think of the various emotional states you have encountered among individuals with whom you currently work. Which do you find easiest to deal with?

Negative Emotions I Can Deal with Easily (minor triggers)	Negative Emotions that are More Challenging to Encounter (major triggers)
e.g. frustration	*e.g. despair*

(continued on the next page)

3. Identify those that are most challenging for you. Think about what specifically makes the challenging emotions difficult to deal with. Think about times you effectively dealt with a team member's challenging emotional reaction or state. What made it easier for you to deal with? Was it the person, the place, the situation, your current emotional state, or something else?

Negative Emotions that are Major Triggers	What I Find Specifically Challenging	Factors that May Help Reduce the Challenges

Notes:

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Anger as a Symptom

Learning objective:

This team activity examines situations where anger is a "secondary emotion" in order to understand when it may be a symptom of an underlying "primary emotion".

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for team members, flip chart, and markers.

Instructions:

Prior to the meeting, make a copy of the chart below on the flip chart.

Suggested wording:

Anger can be a normal, healthy and useful emotion that we all experience in certain types of workplace situations. Like any other emotion, anger exists on a continuum and varies in severity. Anger intensity ranges from minor annoyance, irritation or frustration, all the way to fury or rage. Anger can serve a useful function in some situations: for example, when we are being threatened, attacked or treated unfairly.

Sometimes we become angry in situations where it does not serve a useful function, and where we are not under any type of actual or perceived threat. In these situations, anger is often a "secondary emotion" – meaning that it may be a symptom of an underlying "primary emotion" that may be hidden or more difficult to deal with. For example, if you tease someone about slacking off at work and they respond with unusual anger, it may be that they feel taken advantage of at work or fearful of losing their job. They may therefore interpret your teasing as a threat or attack even when it was not intended that way.

Think about situations that have elicited a strong anger reaction from you. Try to recall a situation in which you realized in hindsight that anger was actually a secondary emotion – a symptom of another, underlying emotion. If you can, try to generate one example of the primary emotions, and reflect on reasons why anger may be a more comfortable emotion for you in certain situations.

Instructions:

1. Have team members copy the chart below onto their own pieces of paper:

Situation	Primary Emotion was Fear/Anxiety	Primary Emotion was Insecurity	Primary Emotion was Sadness or Hurt
My reaction as seen by others…			
My thoughts at the time…			
Why might my primary emotion have presented as anger?			

2. Ask team members to generate one example for each of the primary emotions in the chart, and reflect and discuss reasons why anger may be a more comfortable emotion for certain situations.

3. Once everyone has completed their chart and there has been some discussion, ask team members if they would be willing to share some of their responses. You may wish to go first to break the ice.

To wrap up, restate the purpose of the exercise and ask the team members if the exercise and discussions have helped them to examine situations where anger was the "secondary emotion" and why it may have been a symptom of an underlying "primary emotion".

Expressing Anger Constructively

Learning objective:

This team activity explores how expressing anger constructively may be the best way to minimize problematic circumstances in the future.

Time required:

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each group member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

Record the 'Five Steps to Expressing Your Anger Constructively' and 'Key Words' (found under the Instructions section of this activity) onto the flip chart in advance of the meeting.

Suggested wording:

Experiencing the range of positive and negative emotions is simply a part of the human experience. It is not reasonable to ask anyone, including yourself, not to have certain emotional reactions. They are simply inevitable. This means that you will at times, no matter how much you would prefer not to, experience anger in the workplace.

It is natural to experience anger, and it is also natural to seek to express your anger. To ignore anger is to ignore its basic function of sending you a message about a difficult situation. Anger usually arises as a reaction to frustrating circumstances, and expressing the anger may be the best way to minimize circumstances such as these in the future.

It is important to consider how you can express your anger constructively. Here are five steps toward this goal:

Instructions:

1. Read out each step and invite discussion and questions from team members after each step.

The Five Steps to Expressing Your Anger Constructively:

1) Before saying or doing anything, take a moment to contemplate whether you are **justifiably** angry, or whether your angry reaction resulted from an impulse due to a misperception or an unrelated personal trigger.
2) Remain **respectful** at all times. (Do not make judgments or accusations. Avoid raising your voice, name-calling or swearing.)
3) Ensure that the anger stays **proportionate** to the situation (don't overreact).
4) **Avoid personalizing** the situation (e.g., say "the fact that your project is late is causing real difficulties for the team" rather than "I'm so tired of you not caring about deadlines").
5) Remember that the goal of expressing anger **constructively** is to address its cause and work toward problem-solving the cause, not to punish those involved in causing it.

2. For easier recollection, have team members write down the key words again:

Key Words:
- Justifiable
- Respectful
- Proportionate
- Depersonalized
- Constructive

3. Invite reflection and discussion about these key words.

To wrap up, restate the purpose of the activity and encourage team members to remember and use the five key words in the future in order to express their anger constructively.

Suggested wording:

This may seem like a lot to remember, especially when you are in the midst of an angry reaction. Take a few moments now to contemplate the core ideas.

If even one or two of these key words come to mind in a situation in which you must express your anger, you will be taking strides toward doing it effectively. And, simply pausing to think of your technique may provide all the time you need to calm down enough to make certain you are expressing anger constructively.

Notes:

Dealing with Worry

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps build effective problem solving skills to reduce the stress that can be caused by worrying.

Time required:

Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Handout (or email a list of questions in advance of the meeting).

Instructions:

Copy and paste the list of questions below and hand them out (or email them to all participants in advance). Complete your own before you begin the session, as you will be demonstrating how to more effectively deal with worry at work.

Pay special attention to the things your team worries about at work. You may want to jot them down so you can help problem-solve any unresolved worries later on.

Suggested wording:

If you haven't already done so, please answer the questions on your handout. Everyone will be asked to share their answer to question #1, and I will ask for volunteers to share answers to the other questions.

The point of this exercise is to improve our problem-solving skills. I'll begin with my worry and it is:_____.

Once you have shared your answer, ask everyone to share his or her answer to question 1. After everyone has shared you can the share the rest of your answers to questions 2-5, ask for volunteers to share theirs.

1. What's one thing you worry about related to your work?
2. What's the worst thing that could happen?
3. How likely is it that this terrible thing will, in fact, occur?
4. If it did happen, what would you do, and/or who would you turn to?
5. What other challenging situations have you handled that indicate you would probably be able to handle whatever may come along?

Suggested wording:

Thank you for sharing your examples. While worry is pretty common, it can also be a waste of our energy. If there is something that needs to change or be dealt with, we should do this as a team. If it cannot be changed or dealt with, we should develop a way to accept that.

When we discuss what we are worried about, often we can find solutions to help reduce our stress.

To wrap up, let's take a moment to individually consider one constructive thing you would do differently when worried about work in the future.

Activity developed with help from: Deri Latimer, Positivity Speaking.

Examining Emotionally Driven Decision-Making

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps team members explore factors that may make it more likely for emotions to drive decisions, which can sometimes result in irrational or hasty decisions.

Time required:

Approximately 25 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

A flip chart may be useful to copy down answers or thoughts from the group to reflect on throughout the exercise. It may be beneficial to write the following headings on the flip chart ahead of time, so you will be prepared to record responses:

Situational Demands	Other People's Expectations (specify whom)	My Thoughts About the Situation	What I Could Have Done Differently

Suggested wording:

We may engage in emotionally driven decision-making when we find ourselves in situations where our emotions are highly stimulated. Emotionally driven decision-making (or impulsive decision-making) is particularly likely to occur in situations that are especially stressful or ambiguous (e.g., when there is a lack of clarity about what we should do or are expected to do). The types of situations that lead to impulsive decision-making vary from person to person. It can be helpful to explore the factors that make it more likely for emotions to drive your decisions.

Instructions:

1. Have team members copy and respond to the following on their papers:
   Think of a situation at work where you engaged in emotionally driven decision making, and where you later had second thoughts about the decision you made at the time.

> Describe the situation.
> Describe the situation(s) you arrived at.
> Describe the decision(s) you would have liked to have arrived at.

2. Invite team members to share and discuss their scenarios and decisions.

3.Have team members copy the following chart:

Situational Demands	Other People's Expectations (specify whom)	My Thoughts About the Situation	What I Could Have Done Differently

4.To complete the chart, instruct team members to think about the factors that contributed to them making an impulsive decision in their situation. Often, the factors include the demands of the situation, other people's expectations, and their own thoughts about the situation. Which of these played a role for them? What could they have done differently?

5.Invite team members to share and discuss their findings.

To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and encourage team members to continue to reflect on recognizing factors that will result in emotionally driven decision making and how to avoid these scenarios.

Suggested wording:

Unfortunately, making decisions on the spur of the moment can often lead to irrational or hasty decisions, as our thinking is often muddled and we may not take time to consider all relevant factors. Team members whose decisions strongly impact the experiences of other co-workers have a clear responsibility to help ensure they make the best decisions possible. While emotions can be an instructive component in decision making, strong emotions can interfere. Emotions, in other words, should not 'drive' the decision-making process.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Mindfulness

We acknowledge that not every work team is ready to venture into the area of mindfulness, but research has provided evidence that this practice can improve stress management and ultimately productivity at work.

The activities in this section are for those who want to explore mindfulness from a practical perspective:

Mindful Minutes to De-Stress
Calm the mind to improve focus and reduce stress.

Wearing a Mona Lisa Smile
Understand how reducing tension in the face and body can reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

Lost productivity related to absenteeism, presenteeism (when an employee is physically present but unproductive), and turnover cost Canadian companies $6.3 billion [annually].

(Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Adair, C. E., Ahmad, S., & Khan, M., 2011. The Life and Economic Impact of Major Mental Illnesses in Canada 2011 to 2041. RiskAnalytica, on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.)

Mindful Minutes to De-Stress

Learning objective:

This team-building activity helps team members develop skills for calming the mind, to improve focus and reduce stress.

Time required:

Approximately 10-15 minutes per session.

Instructions:

Ideally, the leader would try this activity a few times him- or herself, before rolling it out to a team.

Suggested wording:

Most work situations require focus and energy. Slowing down may feel counterproductive to some employees. However, research shows that taking time to slow down, even for just a few minutes, can in fact improve productivity and focus.

As challenging or ridiculous as it may feel for some of you, please give this a try. Notice the stress that is in your body right now. Is it in your neck, around your eyes, in your shoulders? Pay attention and notice the changes after we complete this exercise. I'll be talking in my best calm, slow voice and you just need to close your eyes and follow my instructions, which are conveniently labeled A, B, C, and D. Try to keep your body and mind still throughout this exercise.

1) A is for "Anatomy". We don't want the physical body getting in the way of the mind. Sit comfortably in your chair, feet on the ground, hands placed on your legs or in your lap. Don't lean too far back – you may get sleepy, and this is about calming an alert mind.

2) B is for "Breathing". We just need to breathe in…*(demonstrate breathing in slowly)* and out…*(demonstrate breathing out slowly)*. The skill here is to train your mental focus on your breath rather than on your thoughts. Breathe in and out normally; don't hold your breath. Just pay attention to it.

3) C is for "Counting". Breathe gently while you silently count in and out. "1" breathe in…, "2" breathe out…, "3" breathe in…, and "4" breathe out...

   Lead the group slowly and in a whisper through a count of 10, then ask them to continue for another minute or so on their own. Give the following instruction in a soft voice after 20 seconds or so.

4) D is for "Distraction". You *will* get distracted by sounds, smells… and thoughts. Each time you notice you're being distracted, gently bring your attention back to your breathing and start again at "one".

   Allow the group to continue in silence for a few minutes.

5) *Wrap up in a soft voice with: OK.* Now when you are ready, open your eyes, look around, and maybe take a stretch. Pay attention to the places where you felt stress when we started. Is it the same or better? Do you feel more or less focused? We did this for fewer than five minutes, yet most of us will have gained a sense of calmer focus. As you go about your day, see if you maintain a calmer, more productive focus.

Instructions:

You can also follow up by suggesting people try this the next time they're feeling stress or anticipate they'll be going into a stressful situation.

Or, if they are interested in why this works, you may want to recommend they listen to the Ted Talk by Andy Puddicombe, "All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes", which can be found online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzR62JJCMBQ

Wearing a Mona Lisa Smile (can Lift Your Mood)

Learning objective:

This group activity reminds team members that reducing tension in the face and body can reduce the intensity of negative emotions and help lift your mood.

Time required:

Approximately 15 minutes, depending on group size.

Materials required:

Paper and writing utensils for each team member, flip chart and markers.

Instructions:

Prior to the activity, record the following on the flip chart:

>   a. What thoughts are going through your mind?
>   b. What emotion(s) are you experiencing?
>   c. Rate the intensity of the emotion(s) on a scale of 0 to 100.

Suggested wording:

Researchers have shown that the simple act of positioning your face into a (natural) half smile can lift your mood. It sounds too simple to be true, but it works!

Try this simple exercise: think about a recent situation that made you angry. Close your eyes, clench your fists, lean forward, and squish your face into a 'mad' expression. Hold this posture for about a minute while thinking about the situation and your anger in detail. Try to remember what was said or done, how you felt and why the situation made you angry.

Instructions:

1. Before the minute has passed, pose the following three questions to the team members to think about:
>   a. What thoughts are going through your mind?
>   b. What emotion(s) are you experiencing?
>   c. Rate the intensity of the emotion(s) on a scale of 0 to 100.
2. After the minute passes, have team members unclench their fists and sit back in a relaxed position. Ask them to write their responses down to the questions posed.
3. Invite discussion and reflection from the team members.

Suggested wording:

Now, relax your face and put on a gentle half smile (similar to the woman's expression in the famous Mona Lisa painting). The muscles around your eyes and mouth should feel relaxed, and your mouth should be slightly upturned. Think again about the same situation for approximately one minute, while holding this posture.

Instructions:

1. Before the minute has passed, pose the following three questions to the team members to think about:
>   a. What thoughts are going through your mind?
>   b. What emotion(s) are you experiencing?
>   c. Rate the intensity of the emotion(s) on a scale of 0 to 100.
2. After the minute passes, ask team members to return to their regular posture. Ask them to write their responses down to the questions posed.
3. Ask if they noticed any (even if slight) reduction in the intensity of their emotional reaction.
4. Invite discussion and reflection from the team members.
To wrap up, restate the purpose of this activity and suggest team members try practicing this exercise throughout the workday to help reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

Suggested wording:

Try practicing throughout the course of your workday. Actively remind yourself to smile (you may want to put a reminder on your computer or telephone, or place a sticky note in a place where you can easily see it).

Although it can take some practice, over time you may find that the simple act of placing your face into a half smile – a "Mona Lisa Smile" – can reduce the intensity of negative emotions you are experiencing.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Conclusion

One component of resilience is the ability to adapt to change. Team dynamics change. Team members and leaders change. Your organization itself will change. Being prepared with strategies, approaches and tools to improve your ability to anticipate and adapt to these inevitable changes will go a long way to promoting higher levels of effectiveness, well-being and mental health in the workplace.

Improving our effectiveness as leaders and building stronger teams is a key strategy for helping us respond more effectively to stressors in both work and life.

Additional activities are available at:
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Notes:

Acknowledgements

Addendum A – Assessment Tools

The following assessment tools can be taken as part of your focus on improving your skills in these areas to help you measure your current skill set, identify areas for improvement and hopefully identify improvements that may occur after you've completed some or all of the leader and team-building activities.

Management Style Quiz – Assess how your management style contributes to staff well-being and performance.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/mmhm/survey.html

Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment – Take the online and interactive Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment to enhance your ability to manage negative emotions in the workplace.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/mmhm/skillsassessment1.html

Via Institute on Character Take the free Character Strengths test to help gain an understanding of your personal strengths and values.
www.viacharacter.org/Survey/Account/Register

Building Emotional Intelligence – Everyone can benefit from building emotional intelligence, especially among those whose roles including managing, supporting or leading team members.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/psychological-health-and-safety/building-emotional-intelligence

Managing Emotions – Dealing with stressed out, angry or emotional team members can be challenging. Working in a supervisory, supportive or leadership role comes with unique challenges, stressors and demands.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/mmhm/emotion.html

Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations: Emotional Intelligence – What it is and Why it Matters – Detailed report that lays out the history of the concept of emotional intelligence as an area of research and describes how it has come to be defined and measured.
www.eiconsortium.org/reports/what_is_emotional_intelligence.html

Addendum B – Facilitating Team Discussion

Facilitating a meaningful team discussion is not something that comes easily for everybody, especially when the topics may be controversial or sensitive. The following are some strategies that may be helpful to engage team members in productive conversations while managing negative or problematic responses.

You can also view this guide online at
http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/free-training-and-tools/facilitating-team-discussions

Tips for Successful Team Discussions

Preparation

- Review and be clear on the objectives and expected outcomes for your discussion. Write these up and share it with your team in advance of the discussion.

- Ensure you have a meeting room that allows for comfortable collaboration among all members of your group. Help yourself focus effectively by doing a quick scan of what you are thinking and feeling before you go into the meeting. This can help you be aware of any negative thoughts that you may be bringing into the meeting, so you have a better chance of not allowing them to influence your facilitation. Read Questions to Ask Yourself Before Engaging Team Members to help you with this.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/pdf/Questionstoaskbeforeengaging.pdf

- Consider whether any organizational policies, procedures or resources are relevant to the discussion you will be holding, and if so, have copies at hand.

- If relevant for your organization and the topic being discussed, appoint someone to take minutes and distribute them to the group following the session.

- Send out discussion guidelines to participants in advance. The example below is provided courtesy of Mindful Employer: *(www.mindfulemployer.ca)*

Know your Audience

- In some cases, it may be necessary to introduce yourself if some team members do not know you well. Write your name somewhere visible.

- If team members aren't all familiar with one another, you may want to complete an icebreaker activity. Ideas for icebreaker activities can be found online on adult education websites.

- Acknowledge potential challenges or past problems. If your team has had challenges in the past with discussions, or has a history of not following through on what was agreed, participants may be sceptical as to whether their involvement can make a difference. Being up front about wanting to do things differently can open up a new opportunity to connect more effectively.

- We are all more engaged when we feel the subject is relevant to us. Find ways of making connections between the topic for discussion and your team members' work experiences. For example, highlighting that we all have days or periods in our lives where we feel distressed or are going through something difficult could be relevant to a discussion on workplace mental health.

Manage Expectations

- Generally, organizations must meet certain business objectives to remain viable. So when discussing strategies or coming to decisions with teams, it is reasonable to ask: "Does the strategy or decision support team members in meeting their objectives or make things more difficult?" Of course, each team member must be clear on his or her objectives if this question is to be answered effectively. See Supportive Performance Management for more information.
  www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/managing-workplace-issues/supportive-performance-management

- By setting parameters up front in terms of available resources and time, you can help manage expectations. For example, if your budget for a project is only $500 and each team member could only spend up to one hour a week of their time on the project, the discussion should focus on what is possible given these constraints.

- When faced with a request for something that may not be possible due to cost or time, you might ask, "What is the ultimate objective of this idea?" When a measureable and relevant objective is established, ask, "How could we do this within our budget or time constraints?" Often if we can determine the underlying need or objective, we can brainstorm alternative strategies rather than just shoot down the original idea.

- Strive to meet the stated purpose and expected outcomes of the discussion. If you can achieve this, it is much more likely that the discussion will be successful. If you get stuck with a difficult conversation, refer to the purpose and expected outcomes to re-focus energies.

- If someone seems to be taking up more speaking time than seems effective, you can support them to allow others to speak by saying something like: "You have so much to offer, I am wondering if this is something we can follow up on later, and we can hear from someone else now?" Make sure you do follow up with the person later to see if their interest is something that goes beyond the discussion.

- You may find yourself not knowing a lot about a topic you are discussing. This is OK. Allow yourself to acknowledge this by saying: "I don't know much about that. Let's find resources to get us better informed."

Allow Everyone to Feel Heard

- Help each team member get the opportunity to add to the discussion. Give verbal acknowledgement to each person for his or her contribution.

- Manage your own input and avoid long speeches. Be clear in thought when you have an opportunity to give your opinion.

- Ask a lot of questions to ensure that participants understand what you are saying.

- Make sure that you are listening – and that your team members see that you are listening. You can do this by restating the question, answer, or idea shared by a participant in your own words.

- Ask whether you understood their words correctly. If they say no, invite them to restate their question or comment. Remember that when people are nervous, they may not say what they mean to say the first time. Give the participant the option of revising the words used.

- It is important to remember that many people learn better by doing rather than by being told what to do. Wherever possible, have team members come to their own conclusions through the discussion process.

Sometimes team members may spontaneously share information about themselves in a meeting, including information about their personal lives, their health, or disclosure of a mental illness. While sharing of information does allow us to know each other better, it can also derail a discussion, and can feel uncomfortable. If someone shares personal information, acknowledge their contribution to the discussion and show respect for them, particularly if they have become emotional. Offer them a tissue or water, and ask if they would prefer to stay or take a break from the meeting. Follow up with the person as soon as possible after the meeting to see how they are doing, and whether there is a need for further discussion, helping them access resources for accommodation or support, or managing the team's reaction, etc.

The free tool *Supporting Employee Success* provides some suggestions for responding to questions or concerns from co-workers.
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/managing-workplace-issues/
supporting-employee-success-a-tool-to-plan-accommodations

Provide Feedback

- If a participant appears to be struggling with an idea, comment on the positive ("Thanks for opening up that idea." "Thanks for taking this to a new level."), and then try giving a suggestion ("Can you build on this area?" "Can you consider this concept as well?").

- Try using constructive criticism in the form of a suggested alternative with praise for effort, ideas, creativity, or participation. ("Thanks for that input – can you also consider how we could deal with the time pressures we are facing?" Rather than: "That won't work because nobody has the time to do it.")

Improve Understanding

- Be careful to remember that your team members may not have had the exposure that you will have had to the concepts, acronyms, and jargon related to the discussion. Keep your language simple so there are no barriers to understanding.

- Avoid using overly technical terms and, when you can't avoid them, make sure you define them in a way that the 'new minds' can grasp.

Address negativity or cynicism

- Some participants may think that their involvement will have little or no impact on lasting improvement. If this is the case, you may want to acknowledge this up front and ask for agreement that, in spite of what has gone on before, your group wants something different for this discussion.

- If you can accept responsibility for what has not been perfect in the past – even if its success or failure was outside of your control – and sincerely state your desire to change things in the future, it may help get participants on board.

- If a participant presents a negative statement, you may want to ask: "How could we do that differently?", "What would you think might work better?", "How can we do this in a healthier way?" or "What would a positive outcome of this look like?"

- If a participant pushes back against positive suggestions or seems to be making unreasonable demands, explore what is underlying the person's pushback or demands with questions like: "What outcome is important to you? What would success look like here?", "If we did what you are suggesting, what would be the outcome?" or "Is there another way we can meet that same outcome?"

Sometimes people need more time to feel heard and understood before they can accept changes. If you are experiencing that some people have dug their heels in and no movement seems possible, you may wish to say something like: "I see that we have come to a bit of an impasse. Possibly we need further discussion on this topic at a later time." Narrow the topic down to the specific issue in dispute, and put it on the agenda of your next meeting. You can also approach the individual and offer a separate discussion to allow him or her feel heard and understood.

Resolve Conflict

- Any discussion will be challenging if two or more individuals are in a state of conflict with one another. Before working on effective team discussions, seek to resolve existing conflicts between team members. This process for resolving conflict can also provide more tips for facilitating discussions with teams. *www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/managing-workplace-issues/resolving-conflict*

Wrap Up Positively

- Meetings that take up time without accomplishing effective results are a common complaint. Meetings that are well run and produce positive outcomes and clear decisions can be valuable to everyone on the team.

- Thank your team for making an effort to provide input and be clear about how this contributes to team and organizational success.

www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com