



EMOTIONS ARE CONTAGIOUS, SO SPREAD GOOD GERMS

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Think about how much you dislike the physically sick colleague who drags themselves to work with some horrible lurgy, coughing and spluttering over everyone.

Turn that into an emotional lurgy – the grump, the catastrophiser and, of course, the panicker, who choose to spread their special strains of misery germs around the office.

These may not be physical illnesses. But they are just as infectious in causing general malaise in the workplace.

Our emotions are generated at a subconscious level in an older part of the brain called the limbic system. We experience those emotions at a conscious level as our feelings. Our interpretation of those feelings then directs how we respond to any given situation.

Emotions are critical to best brain function. It used to be thought they got in the way of better judgment and good business, but brain science has revealed our cognition and emotions work hand in hand.

It's only when we fall into the emotional extremes that adverse effects are seen with respect to our higher executive thinking skills of planning, organising and decision-making.

This is evident in the office, as it applies to our communal way of thinking and behaving. You will have felt this yourself, whether as an employee or as a manager: walk into any work environment and you can immediately sense the prevailing mood.

Don't forget that just like the flu, misery has a bad habit of starting at the head and working its way down. In other words – leadership matters. If the head is showing a great attitude, then others will follow by example.

As a manager or boss, your emotional state is critical, because others look to you for guidance.

If you are stressed, snappy, or irritable – whether you attempt to hide it or not – others will notice, and start to be at risk of infection by negative emotions. These can quickly escalate into an epidemic of plague proportions called fear, worry and anxiety.

The brain operates on a safety-first principle; it's highly attuned to pick up threats, meaning our negative emotions have a much faster and deeper impact on our thinking than positive ones. The plague of fear and worry can infect the entire office before you can say 'smile'.

Let's face it: stress, anxiety and depression levels are all escalating, so it's imperative we identify how to regulate our emotions and retain access to our logic and reasoning.

And, yes, it's tempting just to ask for a transfer, but there are other ways to avoid emotional contamination.

Other than looking for an emotion-reflecting jacket and gas mask, one way to spare your own feelings from being infected with negativity germs starts with self-awareness.

Just as we state at Immigration that we haven't been loitering in germ-ridden environments, checking in and thinking about our thoughts and feelings provides a mindful review on whether these are helping or hindering performance.