

3 BUSINESS-RELATED SKILLS TO MASTER EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

The future of firms and companies belongs to those who have undertaken a personal and group educational path designed to develop the most valuable sort of skills: self-control, self-awareness, and conflict-resolution skills.

By Matteo Rizzato

Try to imagine two managers or executives who play a major role in a firm.

Imagine the first one. He thinks speed equates to productivity and often skips lunch because he says he doesn't have time. He views human relations as a waste of time and hence a distraction from work. When his colleagues get back from their lunch break, he instantly asks for their morning reports and arranges for any adjustments to their afternoon duties. He tends to concentrate other people's responsibilities in his own hands, because he feels he is indispensable. He feels nobody is as clever as he is, because he's been there for years and knows the company inside out. He is so hectic in his work that when he gets home all he wants to do is to collapse on the sofa. He doesn't want to hear anyone speak, not even his six-year-old daughter, who usually tries to get him to play with her in the typical ways children of her age do.

What sort of relationship do you think he has with his friends? What sort of opinion do you think his fellow workers have about him? Is he happy?

Now imagine the second manager. He has the same responsibilities as the first manager, but feels that everything should be done according to its own timing. Every day he has lunch with different colleagues, who often are from other departments. He carefully selects his meals, as he feels that diet is important both for one's health and for one's emotional balance. When he has lunch with his co-workers, they often discuss amusing or cultural topics they may share an interest in. He sets aside the last 10 minutes of his lunch break to schedule afternoon tasks and discusses these with the others. Whenever possible, he delegates the duties he is already familiar with in order to enrich other people's skills. He often uses his idle time to reflect upon his peace of mind and that of his co-workers and researchers' strategies that may create a more relaxed working environment. He feels serene when he gets home. And, he greets his family and devotes himself to his small daughter until it is bedtime for her, enjoying her creative nature and positive energy.

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A Tale of Two Managers

Here we have two outstanding examples, designed to stimulate your opinions. I work with many managers from different working environments. Out of the two examples provided, the second one is definitely the most productive, and I want to explain why. The first manager produces an amount of work, which is apparently high, but is inefficient. He is possibly good at "doing" things, but he does them in a self-centred mode. He is unlikely to share his work with others, because others do not enjoy his company. As research on mirror neurons show, a work atmosphere tends to be "shared" also from an emotional point of view. If somebody displays negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress, and the like, those who happen to deal with them will tend to "experience" the same emotions and be somehow "infected" by them. Anxious and stressed people are much less productive. They create negative relations, and this has a direct impact on the productivity of the whole company. On the other hand, those who work in a relaxed and easy-going environment tend to work faster and to be more efficient and responsible in their behavior, because they have triggered a cooperation system, based on the idea that, if an individual is happy, everyone benefits from it.

If we are tense when we do things, whatever we do turns out badly. On the other hand, if we are calm, everything appears clearer, and we also tend to have the most brilliant ideas.

So what should we do at this stage? The future of firms and companies belongs to those who have undertaken a personal and group educational path designed to develop the most valuable sort of skills, which unfortunately cannot be included in a CV. Those who have such "soft skills" become essential and will be in growing demand on the labor market, objective skills being equal.

Let us take a look at some of these:

- **Self-control:** Starting from the assumption that we realize we are feeling an emotion when it already has taken over and we have no way of concealing it, a helpful question could be: "How long does it take me to realize I am experiencing a negative emotion?" Self-control has to do with being able to handle a negative emotion as quickly as possible. We all can get angry, but how long does it take us to do something to get that anger under control? Six months? Too bad. Six days? This is still not good enough. Think of how much damage you can do in a firm in six days. Six hours? This can be improved. Six minutes? Well done. Six seconds? Exceptional. The company can't do without you.
- **Self-awareness:** Have you ever heard a recording of your own voice? Do you like it? To start with, nobody likes their own voice, yet it is exactly what the world hears. Your voice isn't what you think it is: It is the voice that others listen to. If we don't even know what our real voice sounds like, how can we be aware of how we walk, of how we gesticulate, of our facial expressions in dealing with other people? This requires constant daily training. Trying to "see

ourselves” from the outside as if we were on camera can teach us a lot about the quality of our communication. How many people don’t realize they are speaking too loudly? How many people look constantly annoyed while working? How many people keep grumbling all the time and make other people’s work more difficult? Being aware of ourselves is a rare skill, but it is indispensable for the company.

- **Conflict-resolution skill:** Those who are unable to manage their moods and feelings, who sulk, are troubled, or convey negative emotions at work unconsciously generate endless conflicts. When you are working together with this sort of person, would you expect to be in the right mood to listen to customers? Even if you know the most advanced communication strategies, nothing can really beat your mood. When you are in a positive state of mind, you are attractive and authoritative, and make other people feel good, too. If you have a co-worker who is able to detect other people’s negative moods and tries to resolve potential conflicts even before they actually materialize ... there you have another person who is indispensable for the company. The future will not be kind to those who create a negative emotional atmosphere.

When we share an elevator with somebody who is wearing too much perfume, we are not happy because we are forced to endure that smell, too. A negative mood is much worse, because it negatively impacts other people even if they are sitting several yards away.