



## Emotions in the Workplace – a no-no?

*“How can I control my emotions at work?  
How can I cope with my co-worker being  
emotional?”*

These are questions which are frequently encountered when staff approach the Ombudsman. Often it is the case that staff find it difficult to deal with their own or their co-worker’s emotions in the workplace. A certain situation may have triggered an emotional reaction, which you did not expect or do not feel comfortable with.

A neutral third party could give the opportunity to discuss the issue openly and frankly and to explore possible avenues. Issues you may find difficult to be addressed can be discussed confidentially. In fact, confidentiality is a major principle of the Office of the Ombudsman and ensures that your identity will not be revealed without your express permission.

*“Emotions should be kept out of the  
workplace”*

It is important to be aware that emotions are an integral and inseparable part of everyday organizational life. Also, managing emotions can be considered a prerequisite for maintaining relationships at the workplace.

Being aware of one’s emotions can help identify possible problems or sources of future conflict before situations escalate.

For example, anger can prevent you from perceiving a situation clearly, even one that did not cause your anger. It may lead you to overlook facts and make decisions you regret later. Also, you might snap at the next person simply asking you something, because you are annoyed or frustrated about something else.

In addition, you have to be able to recognize your own emotions to express them clearly to others.

Some steps you could follow to attain emotional self-awareness and progress naturally into self-management are:

1. Tuning in to your emotions to identify what you are feeling.
2. Next, you need to recognize the cause of your emotions and their impact on you. People who are self-aware of their emotions are willing and able to take an honest look at themselves.

One technique is observing yourself, it involves mentally detaching from your

emotions – thus in a way watching yourself from far away - and examining your behavior. You take a look at your emotions like a neutral third party and watch how they affect you. Mentally observing yourself and your behavior in this way can help you become more aware of your emotions and your response to them.

3. Accept your emotions.
4. Finally, you can take action to manage your emotions appropriately.

All of this of course is not an easy process. Many variables play a role here, your personal background and culture and that of others are influencing your responses. You may come from a culture where emotions are normally not publicly displayed and you may therefore find it difficult to express your emotions. These are factors to take into consideration. If you are aware of these factors, you will be able to identify steps to improve communication.

Furthermore, if you are sensitive to the moods and attitudes of others, try to pinpoint who tends to provoke an emotional response in you and why. Also, certain words or subjects might trigger an irrational emotional reaction from you, because of past experiences or certain beliefs you hold. You could imagine preparing a more diplomatic response than an impulsive reaction. In addition, showing emotional sensibility and rephrasing may help to bring across your opinion better.

So firstly you have to be sensitive to your own behavior and its impact on yourself and others.

The second step includes doing something about it - managing your emotions constructively.

When you encounter challenges in communication, have problems coping with your emotions at work or when situations have escalated, contacting the Office of the Ombudsman is one of your options. The experience and neutrality of an Ombudsman is able to help you explore possible ways to cope with such situations.