

PRESENCE PRACTICE #2

Emotional awareness: Name it!

To have emotions is to be human. Some people diminish emotion and instead worship logic, which is a big mistake if you work with human beings. Emotions are an animating force that motivate us to decide and act. Brilliant researchers like Dan Lovallo, Nina Mažar, and Dan Ariely have shown that big decisions in companies and personal lives have rich emotional elements. As Ariely says, we are “predictably irrational.”

While some discount emotion, others seem ruled by emotion. Neither extreme leads to organizational Vitality, which, if you recall, is achieving more with less time, money, and stress. When a Vitality leader can wisely honor emotion and not be victimized by it, we call that emotional agility.

Most of us are not skilled at naming or expressing our feelings. Rather, we default to talking about our feelings instead of acting from them with confidence. In the process, we lose the clarity and choice regarding the emotions that animate our actions.

So, for instance, one might say, “I feel that you should have included me in the decision,” rather than, “I felt hurt and insignificant when I was not included in the decision.” The former is a thought; the latter is emotion.

Knowing how you feel is essential for powerful communication. If you learn to distinguish a rich palette of feelings and express them consciously, you will upgrade your own intelligence and the influence you have on others.

The following is a set of six common emotional “families.” Each family is defined by words that describe the emotion on a continuum from moderate to intense:

- **Glad:** from approval to elation
- **Sad:** from disappointment to despair
- **Mad:** from disapproval to fury
- **Afraid:** from avoidance to terror
- **Ashamed:** from embarrassed to guilty
- **Content:** from relaxed to serene

Our promise: if you do the 5-minute process below once a day for three weeks, you will dramatically improve your emotional awareness and agility, and people will notice. Use the worksheet on the next page to follow this process.

- 1.** Name a significant event or experience that happened that day. Anything that the word “significant” brings to mind will work.
- 2.** Scan the emotional families and pick the one that best describes your most prominent emotions regarding the event or experience.
- 3.** Using a 1–10 scale, how moderate or extreme is the emotion? What word or words describe that spot on the continuum?
- 4.** What happened that triggered the emotion?
- 5.** What is most important to you about the situation? What other emotions arise when you consider what is most important to you?
- 6.** Of all the emotions that could be triggered by the event, which increase your vitality? Which decrease your vitality?
- 7.** Breathe deeply and relax.

When we name and are present to our experience, we are in the position to compare and choose emotion, which is vital to emotional agility. The more you practice, the better you will get at aligning emotion with your most important purposes.

Emotional Families Scale

Glad

approval 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 elation

Sad

disappointment 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 despair

Mad

disapproval 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 fury

Afraid

avoidance 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 terror

Ashamed

embarrassed 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 guilty

Content

relaxed 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 serene