

SIGMA EI Series



**Great Leaders
Recognize Their Emotions**



GREAT LEADERS RECOGNIZE THEIR EMOTIONS

“

Your intellect may be confused, but your emotions will never lie to you.

– Roger Ebert

Emotions are what make us human. Try as we might, we cannot deny the role emotions play in the workplace. It is widely recognized that understanding and expressing our emotions is important for our well-being and happiness, and our work-life is no exception. Many organizations are beginning to acknowledge that our feelings impact our subsequent work behaviors in meaningful ways. Recently there has been a particular emphasis placed on the importance of emotional intelligence at work and learning to identify our feelings in the moment and becoming in tune with our emotions. When people are aware of their feelings, they enhance their ability to communicate their feelings to themselves and others, to manage conflict, and to build professional connections. Understanding our emotions also helps us to ultimately regulate our emotions in the workplace, as identifying our emotional triggers and taking the time to reflect on our feelings can help us better manage our responses. Recognizing our emotions is particularly important for regulating our reactions during moments of high-stress. We can think of emotional self-awareness as an important first step in appropriately controlling our feelings.

In assessing your ability to recognize your own emotions, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I able to vocalize how I am feeling?
- Do I take time to think about how I am feeling?
- Am I able to identify my feelings without judgment?
- Do I practice mindfulness during my workweek?
- Do I pause in high stress situations to examine how I am feeling?
- Am I able to communicate my feelings to others?

Improve Your Insights

Understand the importance: Understanding the connection between self-awareness and important work outcomes can increase your motivation to hone this skill. Self-awareness is at the root of emotional intelligence – your ability to connect with your own feelings impacts how you connect with others’ feelings, how you respond in stressful situations, and how others respond to you.^[1] Leaders who are able to stay in touch with their own feelings can use this information to communicate their needs and regulate their behavior. Self-awareness is an

important component of successful and fulfilling interpersonal relationships at work and elsewhere.

Your emotions are what make you human: While emotions were first believed to be unsuitable for the workplace, it is now widely acknowledged that they play an important role at work. We connect with others through emotions, and this connection can lead to enriched working lives. Instead of shying away from their feelings, leaders who are self-aware and in tune with their emotions can set a precedent for valuing emotional intelligence in their organization.

Recognize your emotional triggers: It can often be difficult to know where to start with learning how to recognize and regulate your emotions. A great place to begin is by understanding the timeline of how your emotions are expressed. Emotions start with a trigger that evokes inward feelings and outward responses. Identifying your triggers for various emotions (i.e., anger, frustration, sadness, fear, etc.) can help you to feel more confident in regulating your reactions to them. Pay attention to when your emotions are getting activated and take the time to reflect on why that is happening and what exactly you are feeling. Try to notice the nuances across varying emotions – at the beginning you may group all intense emotions together as one while not acknowledging the differences between them. Increasing your emotional vocabulary can help you better label your emotions, which will ultimately help you to better regulate your emotions. Ekman’s Atlas of Emotions is a free resource available to help expand your emotional vocabulary.^[2]

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Recognize your Emotions

The following steps can help you gain awareness about your feelings:

1. **Listen to your body.** Your body and mind react to emotions in a reciprocal process, so a great place to start tuning into your emotions is through understanding your bodily reaction to varying events.^{[3][4]} Next time you are experiencing stress, you may notice your jaw is clenched, your heart is beating rapidly, or your stomach feels like it is in knots. Alternatively, when you are experiencing disappointment, you may feel your stomach “drop” or your face frown. Noticing these physical elements can help you identify your feelings and start to recognize patterns in your responses to various situations.
2. **Identify patterns.** Once you have started to notice how your body reacts to emotional situations, you can start to identify patterns in your physical responses to various situations. If you are struggling to find connections within your physical and emotional reactions, you may want to consider taking notes or identifying your feelings using a journal. This process will allow you to build your vocabulary around your feelings and will help you become more comfortable acknowledging your feelings. Taking notes will make patterns in your reactions to stress, anger, sadness, etc. more noticeable. Just

remember, it is important to be nonjudgmental and open-minded with yourself as you take a deep dive into your feelings.

- 3. Practice talking about your feelings.** Next, start practicing your new vocabulary around your feelings by articulating your emotions aloud to yourself or with trusted others (perhaps a friend, family member, or significant other). Verbalizing how you are feeling in the moment can help you become more comfortable expressing your emotions in a workplace setting. You can also practice the “name it to tame it” strategy, where you identify the emotion you are feeling in order to mitigate your negative reaction to it. ^[5] Since emotion recognition is often a precursor to emotion regulation, labeling the emotions we are feeling can help us to think about the situation we are in objectively and think about how we would like to react. If you are struggling to recognize your emotions in real-time, try thinking back to important events that happened over the week and reflect on how those events made you feel.

Resources



[Spotlight on Leadership: Emotional Intelligence](#)



[The Focused Leader](#)



Develop your recognition of emotion in the self by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: support@SigmaHR.com

Call: 800-265-1285

References

- ¹ Goleman, D. (2013). The focused leader: How effective executives direct their own – and their organizations' – attention. *Harvard Business Review*.
<https://hbr.org/2013/12/the-focused-leader>
- ² Ekman, P. (2016). *The Atlas of Emotions*. <http://atlasofemotions.org/#triggers/>
- ³ Niedenthal, P. M. (2007). Embodying emotion. *Science*, *316*, 1002–1005.
- ⁴ Niedenthal, P. M., Barsalou, L. W., Winkielman, P., Krauth-Gruber, S., & Ric, R. (2005). Embodiment in attitudes, social perception, and emotion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *9*, 184–211.
- ⁵ Siegel, D.J., & Bryson, T.P. (2011). *The whole-brain child: 12 Revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind, survive everyday parenting struggles, and help your family thrive*. New York: Delacorte Press.