

SIGMA EI Series



**Great Leaders
Regulate their Emotions**



GREAT LEADERS REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS

“We cannot control what emotions or circumstances we will experience next, but we can choose how we will respond to them.

– Gary Zukav

At work, leaders can often experience high-intensity emotions at inconvenient times, reducing their focus on their work and ability to maintain stable relationships with clients and colleagues. A key distinction between good and great leaders is their ability to regulate both their positive and negative emotions – to respond to their feelings purposefully, rather than reactively.

High-performing leaders are effectively able to control their emotional states, particularly in emotionally charged situations. Less skilled leaders respond to their feelings in ways that can be detrimental to their work. For example, they may be prone to lashing out with anger or may be overly enthusiastic about a new initiative when a reserved response would be more appropriate. Successful leaders do not suppress or express every emotion they have, but rather are able to demonstrate their emotions in an intentional way, helping their performance. Individuals who can regulate their emotions are more likely to perform better at work¹, feel more satisfied with their jobs², and experience greater well-being in their lives overall³.

In assessing your ability to regulate your emotions effectively, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I believe that emotions are something that really can be controlled?
- When I want to regulate my own emotions, what do I do?
- Do I take care of my physical wellbeing when I'm feeling emotionally drained?
- How do I take care of my mental well-being during times of emotional stress?
- How can I reflect and learn from my emotional experiences?

Improve Your Emotion Regulation Skills

Believing is half the battle: Oftentimes, what prevents people from working on emotional skills is the belief that emotions are outside of one's control. Instead, think of emotion regulation as a challenge – emotions can be difficult to control, but not impossible. Consider past situations where you were able to act differently than your first impulse or were able to control your emotions. These experiences demonstrate that you have influenced your emotions in the past and can continue to do so in the future.

Accept rather than suppress your feelings: People often think regulating their emotions means not showing them at all. However, research shows that trying to ignore your emotions by suppressing them makes you feel worse later, as the unexpressed emotions can build up⁴. In contrast, healthy regulation of emotions involves identifying and accepting your emotions, then acting purposefully to prevent them from destabilizing you. For instance, by acknowledging a negative emotion you can pause, identify what is driving your emotions, focus on remaining calm, and move forward in a composed manner. By recognizing and paying attention to emotions, we can be more intentional about how we express these emotions to others.

Know your influence on your employees: Emotions are contagious, and influential leaders in a company can easily sway the emotional climate of their team or organization if they don't have a handle on their own reactions. This is especially true during times of stress and uncertainty, when employees look to their leaders as role models for how to react. On the bright side, leaders who can regulate their emotions to express confidence or calm can also positively influence the emotions of team members to allow them to work with improved coordination⁵.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Regulate Your Emotions:

The following steps can help you become better at regulating your emotions:

- 1. Take a body break.** Intense emotions can feel mentally draining, so to give your mind a break, it is helpful to reconnect with your body. Body breaks can be short or long. Short breaks can involve stretching, eating a snack, or taking deep breaths. If you have more time, going for a walk, exercising, taking a nap, or having a nutritious meal can be beneficial. Once you calm your physiological system, your mind may be soothed as well.
- 2. Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness practices teach you while you cannot control all the thoughts and feelings that pass through your mind, you also don't have to react to each of them. When feeling overwhelmed by either positive or negative emotions, it can be helpful to focus your mind on a single thing, like a mantra. Mantras are short phrases that are repeated in one's head until a tense feeling passes. Some examples of helpful mantras are "this will pass", "become neutral", and "I can do this". Consider trying out inspirational mantras you may have heard from loved ones or role models in your life.
- 3. Analyze your patterns.** Leaders who can closely inspect their own emotions gain a better understanding of their emotional triggers and limits and how to handle them. The next time you feel emotional, try asking yourself the following questions: What's making me feel this way? Why am I having this reaction? Are there any situational, environmental, or other cues that might be influencing my emotions? The answers to these questions can provide you with greater insights about your emotional tendencies and how to manage them going forward.

Resources



[How to Embrace Emotions at Work](#)



[Handling Negative Emotions in a Way That's Good for Your Team](#)



Develop your ability to regulate your emotions 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

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