

# Mental Fitness at Work

By Dr. Bob Acton

People spend a great deal of time and money on personal physical fitness but sometimes neglect the fitness of their minds. And of course, mental fitness is a critical component of work performance. Recent research substantiated that emotional intelligence can be a significant predictor of workplace success. One part of being mentally smart and fit at work involves effectively managing your emotions in the workplace.

Working as a professional can carry with it considerable pressure not least of which is dealing with staff and clients. Effectively managing emotions is a vital part of workplace functioning and is a major contributor to a harmonious workplace, superior productivity, and increased profitability. Effectively managing your emotions at work means not only the limitation of negative emotions such as anger, fatigue, worry, and indifference but also the enhancement of positive emotions such as contentment, joy, competency and passion.

The first step in achieving a greater state of mental fitness at work is being aware of and acknowledging your feelings. Do a workplace emotional audit by being honest with the degree and frequency of both your positive and negative emotions that surround work. Each day next week take some private time away from normal daily demands and self-evaluate your feelings. Moreover, you can start to look how others are feeling around you. This can be a clue to many things such as organizational issues but can also be critical information about how you impact those around you. See how you feel when in the presence of certain others.

The second step is to establish a goal for your own mental fitness. How do you want to feel regarding your professional life? Consider that it is good for you (and your family and friends) to be happy, comfortable, passionate and secure at work almost all the time. Here is an exercise to help. Close your eyes and imagine that you are now approaching your 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and your family and friends have gathered to plan a surprise party for you. During this gathering they begin to tell stories about you and to

talk about your personal characteristics, your accomplishments, and your qualities as a parent and friend. What do you want them to say about you? Are you currently living your life to have them talk about you in the way you hope?

Write your goals down. Create your own personal mission statement. Remind yourself of these goals by putting a sign up or a message on your web browser.

The third step is to identify barriers to your successful mental fitness goal attainment. Ideally, one needs to either eliminate or reduce the barriers to goal attainment. For example, if you have a client that always irritates you, leaves you feeling upset in some manner, you may ask yourself if you really need this client. Is their presence in your firm so necessary that you must endure their behaviour?

The final step is to create opportunities for achieving a positive mental state on a regular basis. Begin by trying to look for early warning signs that you are getting upset. Although stress manifests itself differently in everyone, you, for example, may find that you start off with a knot in your stomach. Instead of seeing this as a sign of impending problems, use it a signal for positive action. You may want to do some deep abdominal breathing, take a walk, or do some yoga stretches. Essentially, you are attacking the negative experience directly in anyway possible and not letting it get a hold of you. It is important to make an active mental and physical effort not to allow the negative emotions to take hold. Ask a mentally healthy friend how they do it.

But of course, being mentally fit not only means dealing effectively with negative experiences and emotions but also it means working to have a preponderance of positive experiences. Actively commit to activities that provide you with positive emotions. Surround yourself with positive people who laugh and see the cup has half full. If you are going to have coffee, make sure it is with someone who leaves you feeling great. Do the same for them. Examine your work and make active attempts to do the work that fulfills you, not drains you. Make it your active practice to do the work that you love. Really listen to others and try to understand how they feel about the issue at hand. Give positive feedback to others. Make them feel good. Laugh.

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