

## Acknowledge and Reframe Emotions

Cloke, K., & Goldsmith, J. G. (2011). Strategy 4: Acknowledge and reframe emotions. In *Resolving conflicts at work: Ten strategies for everyone on the job* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 93-130). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

### What are emotions?

What are emotions and how do different people experience and exhibit their personal emotions? Emotions are complex and often feared; they can be expressed in ways that are constructive or destructive (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011). We all experience emotions, but for many they seem to remain a mystery. Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) claim expressing, acknowledging, reframing, and integrating emotions can be a powerful positive force for problem solving and conflict resolution. Their effective use depends on how we approach, process, express, and use emotions. It can be productive to stop and take a moment to think about our own emotions and how we respond to them. How we accept and acknowledge our emotions can limit or expand our capacity to hear and respond to others, making us more or less available for communication (Cloke, Goldsmith, 2011). It is therefore useful to think of emotions as requiring skill, a skill we can become more skillful in.

### Emotions in the Workplace

Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) posit every conflict produces an emotional response, yet most workplaces and organizational cultures require us either overtly or covertly to “check our emotions at the door,” or “leave them at home” and suppress them. We can temporarily hold back our emotions, but we cannot eliminate them or keep them permanently on hold. To do so simply makes them surface somewhere else (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011). Daniel Goleman has called the ability to recognize, handle, and learn from feelings “emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence consists of a combination of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social or relational skills (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011).

### Goleman’s Components of Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness	The ability to recognize and understand your emotions and their effect on others.
Self-Regulation	The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses or moods.
Motivation	A passion to work for reasons beyond money or status. Pursue goals with persistence.
Empathy	The ability to understand the emotional make-up in other people.
Social Skill	Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. Able to create rapport.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) point out many may be wondering if they are capable of acknowledging their emotions and the emotions of others in the midst of conflict, and if it is possible to learn how to respond more skillfully to emotions. The answer is yes, but one needs to remember there are three fundamental ways of responding to any emotion whatever the type of conflict:

1. We can give in to our emotions and express them in their pure form, externalize them, and risk alienating others.
2. We can tighten up, suppress our emotions, internalize them, and pull away from others.
3. We can relax, acknowledge, reframe, and express our emotions, transform and learn from them, and move closer to others.

### **Reframing Emotions**

Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) state that every organization whether as employees, managers, customers or vendors encounters cultural myths and assumptions that profoundly influence how emotions are experienced and handled. Some of these assumptions include beliefs such as: emotions are irrational, emotions are negative, emotions are not helpful in making decisions, and I'll lose control and go crazy if I express my emotions. These beliefs can derail attempts to use emotions in a productive way in order to manage conflict at work. It is important to realize that it is possible for people to constructively express intense emotions, even in the workplace, through reframing (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011). Reframing is a powerful method for clarifying emotional communication. Reframing generally uses statements, rather than accusations, in an attempt to move emotions in the direction of problem solving rather than further conflict. Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) point out how reframing consists of using empathy to find a fresh word, phrase, or statement that includes the most important content or meaning, while avoiding mistaken impressions created by poor choice of words. For example, you can:

1. Reframe problems as questions or issues rather than as statements of fact or opinion, "I wonder how we might reframe these work issues."
2. Reframe issues so that multiple solutions are possible, "I can think of several ways to proceed."
3. Reframe issues productively, "What are several interests that we can discuss?"
4. Reframe issues in a manner that does not threaten anyone's self-esteem or dignity, "Sandra has a lot of experience with this project."
5. Reframe issues in specific terms rather than general terms, "What suggestions do you have?"
6. Ask the listener to confirm that you framed the issue accurately, "How does my description of this issue sound to you?"
7. Reframe issues so as to encourage creative problem solving, "Let's think about as many creative ways as we can to handle this situation."

Reframing can help your colleagues manage and communicate their emotions by modeling a different way of expressing them. By reframing and asking a series of calm, empathic questions you give others permission to feel what they are feeling, and the space to communicate their needs in a more collaborative way (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011).

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

Summary prepared by Janene Pack, Graduate Assistant, ODR/Dispute Resolution Services for Faculty, 2013.

