



DEALING WITH ANGER IN THE WORKPLACE

BY STEF SCHWALB

We've all had bad days in the workplace. After all, we're only human. Whether it's frustration on a project with fellow team members, a client or career advancement, feelings of anger can emerge. How each employee and management handles these emotions is critical to every individual's and organization's long-term success.

This is the basis of Kyle M.K.'s book, *The Economics of Emotion*. As a customer experience and leadership consultant, he specializes in conflict resolution and has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their customers and employees. He has introduced these principles in his book to the business world at large and successfully applied them to companies within the hospitality, product development, entertainment and retail industries. Kyle has worked with several leading companies, including Apple, Starbucks and The Ritz Carlton.

"I actively started to research customer experience and employee engagement in 2012, but I had been steeped in the world since 2008," Kyle says. "I've worked for, or spent a lot of time with, multiple small businesses, franchisors, medium-sized B2B software developers and larger companies such as Disney. I found the companies that were larger and more established had more respect for culture, but it was harder for them to give each employee the same opportunities, which often created animosity on the company's lower levels. Smaller/newer companies often came with natural growth, so if an employee voiced their opinion or came up with a solution, they had a much higher success rate to see their idea come to fruition, which added to employee happiness and loyalty."



Kyle M.K.

While these primary differences were apparent to Kyle, he also found some critical similarities between small and large organizations. When it came to handling emotions in the workplace and developing the strategies to ensure a positive outcome — as well as employee satisfaction and long-term growth — each of the organizations recognized several key employee needs.

“The common theme among all companies was that everyone needs an appropriate place to vent workplace frustrations,” Kyle says. “This came in the form of one-on-one meetings with managers, town halls or anonymous forms. The more personal it was, the more successful it was.

“The other similarity is that everyone is afraid to make a move when it comes to career advancement, so really great people who were too humble or too shy had problems growing at a company, which led to more fear that they weren’t good enough or frustration that they weren’t being recognized. The best company that handled this had a performance metric for people managers that measured the success rate of their employee’s advancement, so managers were being graded on their ability to coach their team members into more challenging roles and responsibilities.”

For Kyle, applying these “transactions of emotions” as a business advantage seemed a logical evolution that could impact decision-making, profit and profitability in the most constructive way. He based his research on five core emotions that came from his idol, psychologist Dr. Paul Ekman: joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust. “In Ekman’s research, he talks about how these emotions affect us and how to recognize them in ourselves and others,” Kyle explains, “so I took it and applied it to my love for customer experience and people leadership.”

This wasn’t just by chance. Kyle’s realization actually came to fruition when he worked at an Apple Store. “I started as a concierge, and as I stood in the doorway greeting people, directing them and making appointments for the Genius Bar, I watched their faces carefully. I would see them walk in sad because they broke their phone or mad because their computers didn’t work. When I saw those same faces with a smile after spending only 10 or 15 minutes at the Genius Bar, it was a revelation.

“I saw that because our team’s efforts to transform our customer’s emotions were consciously planned. Their happiness was our highest priority. We were operating a

true economy of emotion taking in negative emotions and doing what we could to trade them with positive ones. Apple had the same strategy on the sales floor and in the design of their products — putting more focus on the person rather than the product.”

Another element playing an integral role today in the release of emotions to the public at large, and in several ways into the workplace, is social media. Kyle says without a doubt it has become the go-to forum for all emotional outbursts — both good and bad. “When we used to come home, we would tell our significant other about our bad day,” he says. “Now we post it on social media in the moment when our emotions are still running high. Because people pick up more emotion than they do information, we carry those emotions with us everywhere we go — especially into work — and we either want to share it with or offload it to someone else.”

Also interesting to note: Kyle finds younger generations of workers, who are more active on social media, are more apt to pursue or desert jobs based on a greater emotional awareness (and society’s acceptance to express it) versus generations in the past. “One hundred percent yes,” he says. “Older generations care more about stability, while younger generations care more about fulfillment. If they aren’t fulfilled by their job, they know through the power of the Internet, there are many other opportunities to pursue with the hope that those opportunities bring more emotional fulfillment to their lives.”

Organizations will continue to evolve in the next several years based on the pursuit of emotions in the workplace; whether it’s ensuring happiness and/or managing anger, according to Kyle. “I think businesses will start to focus less on technical skills — because computers will have that covered — and more on people skills,” he explains. “Each year, the World Economic Forum publishes a report about business trends, covering a wide range of topics. In its 2017 survey, it found that emotional intelligence will be one of the top characteristics recruiters will look for in new employees over the next decade. This translates to people who understand how emotion affects them, how it drives behavior in others and how to utilize it to enrich lives.”

Could there be a downside to taking too much stock in emotional awareness and making it an integral part of an organization’s success? Kyle doesn’t think so. “The only downside I can fabricate is the possibility that a company will go down a rabbit hole of thinking through every possible emotional outcome their decision (will) ... end up failing to produce their main product or service,” he concludes. “But generally speaking, it’s like saying there’s a downside to having taste buds; how else would we know if we like something?” **WPM**