

## CHAPTER 1

# Hidden Energy

## Unleashing Maximum Potential

Over a decade ago, IBM met a challenge that would have destroyed most businesses. IBM's leaders, recognizing that the company could not sustain a viable future relying on the hardware that had made it a household name, initiated a complete transformation of the company from a hardware manufacturer to a global problem solver. Their new business model deployed smart teams to work creatively with clients on the development of customized solutions to complex business problems. Instead of just selling PCs to a customer, IBM now fields teams who analyze the customer's workflow to determine the functions that equipment, such as mobile devices, could enable employees to perform optimally.

Transforming the company from building one-size-fits-all products to developing one-of-a-kind solutions to meet unique needs took courage. Such a huge and risky strategy would capsize most companies, but IBM isn't most companies. Its employees often say they "bleed blue," meaning the IBM spirit and culture run through their veins. Their deep emotional connection to the company helped motivate them

to persevere through a difficult transition and played a key role in their success as members of smart, creative teams. The emotional connections and sensations that people feel in the workplace can empower them to come up with innovative solutions to their clients' most challenging problems. At IBM, emotions—as much as, if not more than, IQ or any other measure of brilliance—stimulated people to make their new service business succeed in a radically altered marketplace.

In this chapter, you'll discover that your organization already contains a treasure trove of similar problem-solving potential that you're able to release by stirring optimal (i.e., distinctly upbeat and deeply felt) emotions in your people.

## SPARKING THE CREATIVE BRAIN

I vividly recall the magic that happened one day in a software development team I was leading. The CEO of our company, a trucking giant, had challenged us to alter our computer systems to support a new railroad service he wanted to launch in four weeks. We felt highly motivated and had spent every waking moment over a two-day period straining to find a quick way to modify our trucking software to work for railroads. Sitting together in a conference room, batting around ideas, and drawing diagrams on the whiteboard long after the other company's teams had gone home for the day, one of our teammates, Jake,<sup>1</sup> voiced our basic fear: “We just can't do it in four weeks. These changes are going to take at least four *months*.”

Although I respected Jake, I felt we could do better. “Let's shift our emotions,” I suggested. Several heads nodded agreement. We all needed a break from fear and anxiety. “Forget about all these alternatives and diagrams,” I continued. “Let's take the problem and put it on a mental shelf alongside our anxiety.” I then led an exercise (which I'll outline later in this chapter) to get everyone de-stressed, centered, and feeling

positive. Once the energy in the room had shifted, I said, “Now let’s pull the problem off the shelf, leave all the anxiety behind, and see what happens.” It took only a few minutes before Jake exclaimed, “I’ve got it! I know how we can solve this quickly.” He had devised an elegant solution we could implement in a scant few weeks.

### Make Creativity Job One

The success of an organization depends on those key moments when teams develop creative ways to provide greater value to customers and perform more efficiently in increasingly demanding situations. Too often, a team under pressure falls prey to negative emotions like fear and anxiety and formulates an unimaginative solution that barely gets the job done, takes an eternity to implement, and requires constant repair. However, when they replace fear and anxiety with optimal emotions such as joy and playfulness, they find it a lot easier to dream up solutions that delight customers, rapidly deliver value, and elegantly evolve along with the business.

A 2010 IBM survey reported that the majority of over 1,600 global CEOs agree that the success of their companies rests on the creative problem-solving capabilities of their people. That’s the only way their companies can handle the accelerating complexity of today’s business terrain, with all of its disruptive technological innovations, quickly evolving customer expectations, constantly shifting government regulations, dramatic swings in the global economy, and overwhelming volumes of data.

You must instill creativity at every level, from the senior executive team to the help desk staff, because you cannot afford to waste valuable time waiting for decisions to travel up and down the food chain. By then, impatient customers will have switched to your competition. While executives in the IBM survey agreed that organizations should encourage creativity in frontline workers, they admitted that they did not know how to do that.<sup>2</sup>

Whether your team must solve an internal design problem or invent the next disruptive breakthrough in your industry, they won't exceed your expectations unless you make it clear that creativity is Job One and develop an environment that fosters innovative thinking. Don't leave creativity to chance; shape it by design. Most businesses today focus intently on enabling data-based decisions and streamlining their processes, but these tactics will never spark the creativity needed to get and stay ahead of the competition. Creativity and innovation require the right state of mind. Fortunately, new research in psychology and neuroscience suggests that you can employ specific methods to put any team in the state of mind where creativity becomes a habit.

### Design for Creativity

Creative thinkers see reality in new and exciting ways. Most people looked at a cell phone and saw a small screen useful only for displaying data, but to Steve Jobs it looked like an opportunity to *input* data as well. His insight led to the iPhone's touch screen features. Our teammate Jake solved the railroad problem by thinking differently about our existing software, leading him to the idea of combining database elements in an atypical way that "fooled" our existing trucking system into processing railway routes just as accurately. Our talented team had racked their brains for two days, yet the answer finally came in a flash of insight when they began experiencing optimal emotions.

It takes time and effort, but you really can encourage and develop a team's knack for creative thinking and problem solving. Take the classic so-called candle task problem. This exercise, often used in creativity research, involves giving someone a box of tacks, a candle, and a book of matches. They're asked to attach the candle to a wall (or a corkboard) in such a way that it will burn without dripping wax onto the floor. You have 10 minutes to solve the problem. What would you do?

A creative thinker would empty the tack box, then tack the box to the wall as a candleholder. Now the candle will not drip wax onto the carpet. The solution hinges on seeing the tack box not just as a storage

unit for tacks but also as a potential candleholder. People naturally link the tacks and the box so closely in their minds that they can't easily separate them to solve the problem. How can you get team members to (pardon the cliché) think outside the box? What causes a person to think of using the box in a novel way, and how do you intentionally spark this ability in a person or team?

In 1987, American psychologist Alice Isen conducted experiments that tested the effect of emotion on subjects' ability to solve the candle task. After dividing them into four groups, she induced a particular emotional mood in each. She put the first group into a positive mood by showing them five minutes of funny television bloopers. She soured the mood of the second group by screening five minutes of a documentary film showing Nazi concentration camps. She then dampened the emotions of the third group by presenting a five-minute segment of a math film illustrating the method for calculating area under a curve. The final control group received no emotional manipulation. After the groups had viewed the films, and before they had begun the candle task, Dr. Isen questioned them to ensure that they did feel the intended emotions.

The results of these experiments clearly demonstrated the impact of emotions on problem solving. The subjects in the group experiencing positive emotions were three times more likely to find the solution than the other groups. Isen found little difference among the three other groups.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, Carsten De Dreu, Matthijs Baas, and Bernard Nijstad published an article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that provided an extensive review of research on the impact of emotions on creativity, including an account of the authors' own comprehensive original research in which they measured the impact of mood on subjects' creative fluency and originality while performing brainstorming tasks. The scientists discovered that emotions play a major role in our ability to see the world differently. Our emotions can either open up our minds to see new possibilities, or they can close down our minds in a way that keeps the same old thoughts swirling around in our brains. So which emotional states make us better creative problem solvers?

### Apply Positivity and Arousal

According to the article by De Dreu, Baas, and Nijstad, optimal team emotions that spark creativity begin with positivity. When people experience positive emotions, they gain an expanded perspective that enables them to relate to and integrate divergent material innovatively. Emotions such as cheerfulness and optimism make people feel less constrained and more apt to take risks and explore novel solutions to problems. They also prompt the inclusive thinking that opens people's minds to uncommon perspectives. That's when you decouple the tacks from the box or your existing software from truck routes.

Researchers who conducted one study cited in the article asked participants in positive moods to rate how well a particular object fit within a specified category. They found that these individuals tended to include atypical items in a category. For example, they would more likely include an elevator, a camel, and feet in a category labeled "vehicle" than would a control group of people experiencing a wide range of moods. Good moods open our minds to new possibilities.

On the other hand, negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, signal to individuals that their situation is problematic and that they must take constrained, analytical action to remedy it. Negative emotions shut down their openness to novel possibilities.

Positive emotions come in different sizes, ranging from a low level of arousal to extreme passion. The research article by DeDreu, Baas, and Nijstad provides a thorough examination of the impact of emotional arousal on creativity. As in the "Three Bears," Baby Bear emotions may be too small, Papa Bear emotions too big, but Mama Bear emotions are just right. Low levels of arousal, such as contentment, promote inactivity, whereas extremely high levels of arousal, such as excitement, reduce our capacity to perceive and evaluate information. It's difficult to think clearly when our extreme passion creates a state of exhilaration or euphoria. At moderate levels of arousal, people feel optimally motivated to seek and consider multiple alternatives. Moderate levels of arousal also enhance working memory, which in turn enhances cognitive flexibility, abstract thinking, and access to long-term memory.<sup>4</sup>

Primal team leaders take specific steps to help people experience the appropriate levels of arousal and the optimal level of positive emotions because they know that such a state releases the utmost creativity. They pay close attention to the emotions running through their team, and, whenever necessary, they take sure steps to reshape less than optimal emotions. While they can't force an individual or team to think creatively, they can help them open the door for creativity.

Optimal emotions also help teams meet the other challenges teams face in today's high-pressure workplace, including mind-boggling complexity, nerve-wracking changes that require impossibly agile responses, and other unpredictable disruptive events that can send a team into a tailspin.

## DEEPENING THE IMPACT

Several years ago, Subaru launched a “Love” advertising campaign that highlighted the emotion that drivers feel for their Subarus. In a *Washington Times* article, columnist Marybeth Hicks berated the company for citing love as a reason for buying a car. Hicks argued that an irrational emotion like love should not influence rational purchasing decisions or any other business deliberations.<sup>5</sup> Although most business leaders would probably agree with Hicks, according to new research into the connection between the heart and the brain, Subaru was on to something.

Positive, moderately aroused emotion may stimulate our brain to function more creatively, but heartfelt emotion boosts our creative ability to an even higher level. Our heart has a unique ability to put us in our most creative state.

### Pull the Strings of Heartfelt Emotion

What exactly do we mean by “heartfelt” emotion? How does it differ from positive emotion? Does it deserve any role in a business environment? The answer is a resounding yes. Let's see why. Simply put, posi-

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tive emotions include pleasant thoughts and calm sensations in our body, whereas heartfelt emotions consume our attention and activate a strong sensation in the actual area of our heart. You know the feeling. Think about someone you love “with all your heart.” When you picture that loved one in your mind, don’t you feel a warm, tingling sensation in the area of your heart? Most people do.

In a team, the two types of emotion play out differently:

Positive Emotion	Heartfelt Emotion
Relief when a project is finished	Boundless delight when a completed project delivers great value to the organization
Satisfaction with a bonus or big raise	Unbridled appreciation for a supportive boss
Thankfulness when a teammate works overtime to complete a crucial task	Tremendous gratitude for your teammate’s efforts and sacrifices

Note that the list on the left suggests relatively mild feelings, whereas the one on the right embodies deeper feelings that border on love. “I *love* making our customers happy!” I *love* the way my boss supports my work!” I *love* it when Rick throws himself into the work.” Strong heartfelt emotions can halt our rational mental processes and connect us to people in a much more profound way than relatively mild feelings, such as relief or satisfaction or thankfulness. Heartfelt emotions make our hearts sing, and they set fire to our cognitive and perceptual abilities—traits that every business prizes.

## Synchronize the Parts of the Brain

Your brain's complex system works best when all of its parts are synchronized in harmony. Imagine a championship basketball team that functions best when the five players on the court move in harmony. The center gathers the rebound, the forward takes it down the court, and the guard fires it through the hoop. When your brain's parts function in harmony, flashes of insight are embellished by quick memory recall of key details and then shaped by the neocortex (the analytical center of the brain), resulting in an innovative solution. Although scientists do not fully understand the way all the complex regions of our brains perform together to reach a creative insight, they do know that our sharpest perceptions occur when the various centers of our brain become synchronized. Heartfelt emotion helps harness all of the brain's centers in a way that allows us to solve problems with the utmost creativity.

The Institute of HeartMath, a research organization in Boulder Creek, California, has been exploring the connection between the heart and the brain for over 19 years. Their research studies have appeared in numerous peer-reviewed journals, such as the *American Journal of Cardiology*, *Stress Medicine*, *Preventive Cardiology*, and the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. Much of their research has been aimed at determining the heart's role in synchronizing the parts of the brain. Among other findings, they have discovered that the heart continuously connects with multiple centers of the brain via multiple routes: (1) electrically through two sets of nerve pathways; (2) electromagnetically by radiating a signal that reaches every cell in the brain; and (3) mechanically through pressure waves conducted along blood vessels. These pathways enable the heart to impose rhythmic patterns onto various areas of the brain. Sufficient rhythmic patterns get the parts of the brain in sync.

Think of your heart's rhythmic patterns as ocean waves. Just as the currents and winds and tides affect the height of the surf, so do our emotional states determine the pattern of the waves emitted by our hearts. Different emotions cause different patterns. For instance, anger and frus-

tration cause an erratic and incoherent pattern. One second the sea looks calm; the next it rears up and crashes onto the shore. In contrast, sustained heartfelt emotions, such as boundless delight, unbridled appreciation, and tremendous gratitude, generate a smooth pattern with consistently high peaks and deep valleys, much like the big surf at Honolulu Bay Beach.

Having extensively tested a broad range of people in all sorts of circumstances, HeartMath researchers have found that distinct heart patterns closely correlate with particular emotions. That makes it possible to use the heart's activity to measure a given emotional experience.

The high-peaks-and-deep-valleys pattern generated by heartfelt emotions send an effective synchronizing signal to the brain. Just like big waves in the ocean have a strong impact on moving a ship, the deeper wave pattern of heartfelt emotion has a profound influence on the brain. In fact, heartfelt emotion can facilitate a system-wide shift in brain functioning. Just like a basketball team that functions best when the players get "on the same wavelength," this global shift generates a state of mental optimal functioning as all of our cognitive and perceptual systems begin working in harmony.

HeartMath uses the term "coherence" to describe the state in which all of the centers of the brain develop a logical, orderly relationship. Coherence suggests a high degree of harmony and stability in mental and emotional processes. Heartfelt emotions such as deep appreciation, compassion, or love establish coherence. Our heart quite literally influences our mind.

When team members experience heartfelt emotion, their creative ability ratchets up a notch. That's why primal team leaders try to deepen team emotion. Suppose a team at Faraway University has set up a new system that allows the faculty to conduct classes for students at remote locations. The system displays these students on a large screen and allows them to communicate with their classmates as if they were sitting in the same room. What does the primal team leader do? She picks a few students in the remote location to show the team how dramatically the

new system has enriched their lives. One student, a mother of three small children who has enrolled in an English-as-a-second-language class, tells the team that they have made it possible for her to gain valuable job skills while not leaving her kids with a babysitter. Her heartfelt gratitude delights the team and activates their heartfelt emotion. This helps the team achieve coherence, with waves of energy moving from their hearts to their heads. Of course, this creates a state of mind that will help them come up with their next big innovation.

### Love, Coherence, and Creativity

Countless times I have seen coherence, sparked by heartfelt emotion, boost cognitive performance and prompt creative solutions to even the most perplexing business problems. I particularly recall watching a team working on an online auction site that needed a major software upgrade in order to make it more customer-friendly. But the team could not turn off the application while they worked to improve it because that would cost sales and irritate customers. Without going into the technical details, the team activated their heartfelt emotion and figured out an ingenious way to upgrade the system without turning it off. That sort of coherence enhances abstract thinking and broadens our scope of perception. In a state of coherence, new understandings and novel insights flash into our minds. We begin to see possibilities that previously eluded us. What once looked like a dead end suddenly appears to offer a promising path to success. It happens all the time, no matter how simple or complex the situation.

In this era of Big Data, where avalanches of information threaten to bury us alive, we need to find a way to cut through all the noise and find the clear signal necessary for us to do our work better. Coherence aids that quest. Not only does it enable us to recall information that we have committed to memory, it helps us mentally sift through large amounts of data to pinpoint the most relevant facts we need to make the best decisions. It works for individuals; it works for teams. In a team

environment, coherence creates a condition in which every mind connects to a realm beyond the limits of each individual's capability. Insights arise that no one had previously glimpsed or imagined.

How often have you seen teams struggle with complex decisions? We often have to weigh complicated alternatives. Once again, coherence comes in handy because it increases intuitive clarity and the ability to discern reality. It clarifies the meaning of our flashes of insight. It helps us discern the real consequences of a decision or action and thus saves us a lot of time chasing wild geese or dealing with the unintended consequences of an unwise decision or action.

Suppose my team has to develop a highly intuitive interface for a smart phone application. When team members reach a state of coherence, their intuition, working memory, and analytical ability all work in harmony. Their minds stop jumping from one thought to another, their scattered thoughts coalesce, and their thinking and working grow more orderly and focused. Ideas for new features come immediately to mind, details of prototype feedback they had stored in their memory rise to the surface, and the accuracy of their predictions of the users' reactions to the interface increases. All parts of their minds and memories are working in harmony.

Work environments often create the high stress and troublesome interpersonal problems that undermine a team's sense of confidence. Here again, coherence saves the day because it enhances a team's sense of well-being. One particularly enlightening HeartMath study involved the Information Technology Services Division of a state agency, which was implementing a major technology upgrade that required employees to learn new skills. Not only did the new platform challenge the employees' sense of mastery and security, but changes in leadership also added uncertainty regarding the organization's direction and future. All of this made most employees angry, resentful, and anxious.

Wisely, the leaders of the organization hired trainers to teach breathing techniques that helped employees instantly transform emotional negativity into a state of coherence. The techniques specifically aided

employees in accessing their innate self-confidence by removing the layers of stressful negativity. When the employees learned how to reach a state where they felt collected and capable, they gained and maintained more confidence, even in the midst of a stressful environment. They now felt as though they could handle whatever challenges came their way. Confidence makes people feel hardy and resilient. When the going gets tough, the coherent team perseveres past every obstacle. When change comes along, the team adapts swiftly and effectively. Using the right techniques, team leaders can help their people adapt to major change and get their work done without a major hitch.

In contrast to coherence, negative emotions such as fear, anger, worry, and anxiety can severely limit learning, memory, cognition, and problem solving. Negative emotion leads to poorly thought-out or shortsighted decisions, difficulty finding the right words and remembering key facts, slowed reaction speeds, and a paralysis caused by events that overwhelm us. We find ourselves in a state of confusion that scientists call cortical inhibition. People and organizations in this state can't compete effectively. Such inhibition stems not only from outbursts of anger or extreme anxiety but also from all the little daily hurts and worries about the future that a team experiences.<sup>6</sup>

## DAMPENING THE ENERGY

When I first began leading large teams, I believed that making them happy would make them successful. I spent a lot of time listening to what people wanted and giving them what they said would make them happy: a casual dress code, a strong voice in decision making, a telecommuting option, and flexible work hours, to mention a few. But all that effort ended up with my getting bitten on the hand.

My intense focus on making everybody happy created an environment where people spent way too much time thinking about what they wanted and then complaining when they didn't get it. It all came to a

head one day during a heated discussion about whether managers or their reports should make certain decisions. Some employees argued that team members who actually did the work should make most of the decisions. Others insisted that a top-down approach would speed up decision making and avoid a lot of time-wasting discussion among team members. We could see no easy solution to this problem and ended up with a compromise, which meant that nobody was really happy with the solution. The teams felt frustrated, the energy of the group faded, and the creative juices dried up.

Then one day Derek, an extremely vocal systems analyst, said, "I am so unhappy with the way decisions get made around here." His words turned on a lightbulb in my head. Of course! No approach would make everyone happy because different people want different things.

### Explode the Myth of the Happy Workplace

A March 2013 *Harvard Business Review* blog contended that when organizations create happy workplaces, productivity improves.<sup>7</sup> Who can argue with that? People in good moods solve problems more creatively. But you can't make an entire organization happy any more than you can fit everyone into the same size sneaker. If you try to do that, you will end up with an inbox full of complaints from people who hate black shoes and suffer from sore feet. The factors that lead to happiness come in a broad range of styles and sizes.

According to Jaak Panksepp, an American psychologist and neuroscientist who has conducted extensive research on emotional systems, unique conditioning triggers each person's happiness. In other words, your personal experiences shape the high-level cognitive emotion we call happiness. Such cognitions occur within higher neocortical brain regions that receive all the unique input you experience during your life. What tickles me may nauseate you, and vice versa. I like snakes because my brother kept a pet python in his room; you hate snakes because a diamondback rattler bit your mother on a golf course. Monica wants

the boss to make all the decisions; Derek wants to make all the decisions himself. This applies to every aspect of the work environment.

I now know that leaders should not try to achieve happiness in a whole team or organization. Rather, they should concentrate on simply optimizing the more primal emotions we all share, such as playfulness and the desire for new experiences. These emotions arise from the lower regions of our brain (e.g., the thalamus and hypothalamus) and get passed along naturally. They exist regardless of our unique experiences.<sup>8</sup>

I'm not knocking happiness. I've seen it pervade a whole team. When it does, you get amazing results. However, striving to make everyone happy will end up making *you* unhappy. Happiness may mean different things to different people, but optimal heartfelt emotions don't.

### Conventional Practices

On the plus side, the concept of happy workplaces acknowledges that optimal emotions can help people get good results. Most organizations have the cause-effect loop backward. They work hard trying to achieve success so that they'll feel good, without realizing that feeling good must come first in order to achieve success.

Two other management best practices also respect emotion as a precursor for success: emotional intelligence (EI) and employee engagement. A whole industry has sprung up around EI, which, among other things, recognizes that people in positive moods do a better job. Engagement, which revolves around the notion that success hinges on getting people thoroughly involved in making the organization a success, also stresses the importance of strong positive feelings and attitudes. Although you can use both of these practices to help shape positive employee emotions, you should recognize their limitations.

A December 2001 *Harvard Business Review* article titled "Primal Leadership," written by emotional intelligence guru Daniel Goleman, proposes that an effective leader must maintain a consistently optimistic, high-energy mood. Employees' moods depend heavily on the leader's

emotional state. You'll find a lot of useful techniques for modeling the right behavior in all of Goleman's books.<sup>9</sup> So what's the downside? If Laura plays the "happy clown" to Fernando, jolly and affable on the outside but sad and coldhearted on the inside, she merely *displays* rather than *feels* the positive emotion. Fernando can sense the mismatch. Worse, Laura can suffer from the effects of emotional dissonance, a state in which her emotional display differs markedly from what she really feels. Maintaining the façade can take a huge emotional toll on Laura, resulting eventually in burnout or emotional numbness.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of employee engagement, the leader strives to motivate employees to invest more discretionary effort in their work by instilling in them a strong desire to help the organization. However, leaders too often attempt to shape employees' emotional desires by giving them *logical* reasons to want the organization to succeed. They paint a picture of how employees' jobs fit into the organization's overall strategy, they articulate why the company has a bright future, and they offer logical reasons why everyone gets paid exactly what they deserve. Those leaders who practice the lead-by-logic approach mistakenly believe that reason drives emotion. In fact, as we will see throughout this book, you can more effectively create the state of mind you desire by working directly with emotion.

### Let the Good Feelings Roll

The idea of creating happy workplaces, mastering emotional intelligence, and forging engagement acknowledges the power of emotion in business and the need to optimize it. But the notion of inviting emotions into the workplace repulses many leaders because they find emotions so messy, sticky, gooey, and frustrating. Such leaders would rather ignore than nurture their people's primal natures.

Unfortunately, the very way businesspeople think tends to diminish the positive emotion in workplaces. When something happens at work that evokes happiness or joy, we often downplay those feelings. When

we attract a major new client, we say, “Our advertising department really does a good job.” When we set a new sales record, we say, “Our Widget simply outperforms the competition.” Psychologists use the term “ordination” to refer to this tendency to make exceptional events seem ordinary. Instead of just letting ourselves feel personally delighted over our role in wooing a new client or selling a million Widgets, we use cool logic to explain the event and diminish our reaction to it. Logic trumps delight.

A predictable and explainable event elicits a less intense emotional reaction than a novel and unpredictable one. Because ordinary events command less intense feelings than extraordinary ones, we do not remember them as vividly. Straight-and-narrow businesspeople prefer the predictable and explainable because predictability breeds consistency, but if you emphasize consistency, you rob events of their intense emotional power. They become less dramatic, and thus less memorable, and consequently less influential on the team’s emotions.

The inclination to ordinize events comes so naturally to us that we seldom give it a second thought.<sup>11</sup> Primal leaders understand this human tendency and look for opportunities to encourage a team to revel in the joy of accomplishment.

When your team does something wonderful:

- **Rejoice.** Stay emotional rather than minimizing the event with logical explanations. *“Wow! We hit the one million mark! Amazing!”*
- **Celebrate.** Commemorate the event. *“This marks a milestone not just for our team and company, but for the whole industry. Lunch at Joe’s Grill on me!”*
- **Exclaim.** Show your emotion, telling people how it makes you feel. *“I can’t tell you how happy this makes me. I feel like the day we brought my newborn daughter home from the hospital.”*

## GOING TO THE SOURCE

Tyler, a team leader at Saelco Industries, trudges into the office, worrying about his job. His boss, Liz, has asked him to stop by and chat about his team's weakening performance and deteriorating morale. Although Tyler works hard on his leadership skills and his team likes him a lot, he can't control a lot of what's happening at Saelco.

Upper management keeps changing technologies, priorities, and staffing levels, all of which undermine his team's sense of mastery and security. To make matters worse, a constant merry-go-round at Saelco's top executive level keeps adding uncertainty about the organization's direction and future. All of this keeps Tyler's team feeling resentful and anxious and underperforming.

Liz opens her meeting with Tyler by insisting he make a compelling business case for all the changes. "Look," she says, "the company's moving in the right direction. I'm counting on you to *sell* it to your people and get them back on track." After the meeting, Tyler tries every persuasion technique he knows, but nothing works.

Then one day Tyler comes across an article in a trade journal that explores the topic of primal emotions in the workplace. He realizes that fear and negative emotion have consumed his team and that no amount of cold hard logic will ever conquer those feelings. He makes it a point to learn a couple of emotional self-management techniques that will help his team shift into an optimal emotional state.

Each day for a week, Tyler convenes a 15-minute team meeting in which he guides the group through a three-step exercise designed to shift their emotions to an optimal state:

1. **Stop.** Invite everyone to erase thoughts from their minds. As Tolstoy famously observed, if you tell someone *not* to think about a polar bear, they can't get polar bears out of their heads. Tyler says he likes to picture a perfect tomato in his mind's eye. Concentrating on that round, red, juicy object pushes other thoughts out of his head.

2. **Breathe.** Ask them to focus on the area around their heart and to imagine breathing into their heart for about 10 to 15 seconds. Tyler closes his eyes and demonstrates how to do this: in ... one-two-three, out ... one-two-three.
3. **Activate.** Urge them to conjure up a positive feeling, not just picturing it in their mind, but *feeling* it with their entire body. Tyler explains how a genuine heartfelt emotion feels, and he tells them how he felt when he and his wife brought their newborn daughter home from the hospital.

After a few weeks of setting aside time to elicit heartfelt emotions, Tyler sees a visible change in his people. They smile more often, laugh a lot, and obviously enjoy each other's company much more than they did a few weeks earlier. Liz also notices a new vitality in Tyler's team. Everyone seems freshly energized, exuding much more confidence and enthusiasm. Best of all, they're coming up with solutions rather than dwelling on problems. Liz takes Tyler aside one morning and says, "I don't know how you did it, Ty, but you've turned your gang around." He just smiles. He realizes he can't always convince his team that they should understand and like what's happening in the company, and he certainly can't guarantee a fabulous future. But he can help them feel good about themselves and their teammates and prepare themselves for whatever comes their way.

### Make Emotional Shifting a Daily Habit

Over those few weeks, Tyler taught his team how to self-manage their emotions by instructing them to use the Three-Step Emotion Shifter technique regularly, making it a habit to relax for a moment, to think-breathe-visualize. However, he went beyond the conventional practice that centers on the head when he went straight to the heart. By involving his team's hearts, he could more surely move them into a state of coherence where optimal emotions could help them get better results.

Coherence and a state of optimal emotion, Tyler knows, do not fall on people like rain; people must make their own rain. Anyone can learn how to spot problematic negative emotions that suppress peak performance and replace them with positive ones that promote success. This works no matter what's happening within the team and its environment.

Tyler wanted the team to go beyond *recalling* a past heartfelt emotion like carrying your baby daughter into your house and to feel a genuine heartfelt emotion here and now. He emphasized the somatic, or body-based, sensations involved.

As his people make emotional shifting a daily habit, they facilitate a repatterning of their brains and nervous systems and become increasingly familiar with how it feels to work in a more constant state of coherence. Optimal emotions become more firmly established in their neural architecture. Good feelings and coherence become the new normal.

### Record Biofeedback in a Coherence Journal

Some of the people on your team may find it hard to grasp the rather abstract and elusive concept of coherence. For them, you can make it more tangible and real with the use of biofeedback devices that can measure a person's state of coherence in real time. You can obtain these relatively inexpensive little machines from many sources, but I can personally vouch for a product called an emWave offered by HeartMath LLC. While your team practices shifting his or her emotions, each team member can attach a clip to an earlobe or place his or her thumb on a sensor. They then receive signals that reflect their level of coherence. A green light indicates a state of coherence, and a red one reveals a flatter or more negative emotional state. In addition, a lively bell tells them they've reached a state of coherence, and a dull buzz means they have not gotten there yet. Once the team members see the green lights and hear the jingling bells a few times, they can recognize whether they're reaching it or not in subsequent sessions.

Your team can even record their coherence levels over time by attaching the biofeedback devices to their computers. That way, they can see a graphic, real-time display of their coherence level, which they can log into a personal Coherence Journal. Over time, this diary of responses to daily working situations can tell them a lot about when and how they reached a desired state of coherence. Before long, they'll find it much easier to reach and maintain that state while tackling a major issue.

HeartMath researchers have tested similar techniques in many business and government organizations, from information technology teams in state agencies, to health care providers in for-profit hospitals, to church pastors. Some of the organizations were suffering through stressful changes at the time, and others were simply experiencing the day-to-day emotional ups and downs of the typical workplace.

The results show that people can and do learn to self-manage their emotions in stressful situations, quickly transforming their emotional states to a more positive place and evoking a coherent state at will. Amazingly, they do it without disrupting their work activities.<sup>12</sup>

Tyler's group quickly learned how to shape their emotions. However, most other teams, steeped in the tradition of downplaying emotions in the workplace, will find it much harder to do. In the next chapter, we will learn even more about shifting emotions at the source.

## **USING AN EMOTIONAL SAVVY GAUGE TO MEASURE YOUR TEAM'S EMOTIONAL PROFICIENCY**

Before you move on to Chapter 2, try using this exercise to gauge your team's skill at dealing with emotions. You can apply it to individual team members as well as to the team as a whole. Think about the six ways individuals or the group at large tends to cope with emotions. Which approach best describes their typical stance? Each approach springs from a basic assumption or belief. The way team members talk about an issue provides a clue to that underlying belief.

You can roughly rank your team's emotional know-how on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 meaning you need to make some serious improvements to the way your team handles emotion and 6 meaning you can feel pretty good about your team's emotional proficiency).

1 2 3 4 5 6

1. **Evading Emotions.** Belief: The business will run best without any messy emotions; all conversation should stick to cold hard facts. *"I don't care if the team is feeling anxious and stressed. They just need to meet the schedule and come in under budget."*
2. **Confusing Causality.** Belief: Only success can make people feel good; success does not depend on feeling good. *"If we deliver the project on time and on budget, that will make everyone happy."*
3. **Controlling Behavior.** Belief: You should manipulate your emotions to keep them positive all the time. *"Yeab, the project is three months past due and 50 percent over budget, but I'm optimistic that it's all going to turn out well in the end."*
4. **Applying Reason.** Belief: Logic trumps emotion. *"Employees should recognize that no matter how stressed they feel, this is still a great place to work because we have a solid compensation package and a compelling strategy."*
5. **Shaping Feelings.** Belief: You can reduce negative or stressful emotions. *"Now that we've put that intense shareholder's meeting behind us, let's take a few deep breaths to calm down. We can get back to a happy place."*
6. **Vitalizing Hearts.** Belief: We work best when we activate heartfelt emotions every day. *"We finally delivered the project on time and on budget because we paused every day to shift our emotions to an optimal state."*