

## DEALING WITH EMOTION IN TEAMS

**By Kathleen Ryan**

**Myth:** In groups where people come together to get something done, strong emotions equal messy, difficult group dynamics. These "irrational" elements lead to disagreements and conflicts that disrupt an orderly flow of work, damage relationships, and generally cause "things to get out of hand."

**Reality:** In every group, emotions are always present. And in extraordinary groups, strong emotions are especially present because of the passionate commitment members bring to a group's compelling Purpose. This emotional commitment is what inspires the hard work, full engagement, and intense focus that lead to amazing results.

**Challenge for Leaders:** How to appreciate and use these positive and motivating emotions and build upon them, rather than attempting to bottle them up, manage or control them so that "things stay on an even keel." For a group to be extraordinary, an even keel won't do you any good!

If you lead a task-focused group at work or in the community and you want to encourage outstanding results and an equally wonderful group experience, pay attention to these two points.

- Remember that everyone in your group (yourself included) operates simultaneously on at least two tracks: the Head (task-focused, logic, information, facts) and the Heart (emotion-focused, intuition, relationships, and meaning). Picture a lake and imagine that the Head elements sit above the water-line and that the Heart aspects rest underneath and are less visible from the surface of the water. Know that at any moment a results-focused conversation can trigger emotions and values. They will pop up above the water to demand attention. You'll recognize these heart-based elements by the energetic words that people say or the tone of voice they use when they speak.
- Know that an essential leadership skill is the ability to move easily between the dynamics of the Head and the Heart. In fact, the more you are able to connect and integrate elements from these two tracks, the more effectively you will lead

your group. If you have difficulty in this leadership aspect, you are far from alone! Many who lead groups feel challenged in this way, especially when it comes to working with strong emotions that surface. To help you become more comfortable with this aspect of group leadership or facilitation, take a look at the chart on the next page. It offers some things you can do in a group meeting to recognize, encourage, and utilize the presence of strong and positive emotions.

<b>When...</b>	<b>What to Say...</b>
Someone makes an emphatic and challenging point	<p>What did you hear in what she just said? What was her point? And what was her feeling?</p> <p>What did that feeling trigger in you?</p> <p>(After several have responded) What do these feelings suggest for how we move ahead?</p>
The tension in the room goes up significantly as a result of a disagreement	<p>I'd like to use this disagreement as a way for us to clarify some important points and help us to collaborate effectively.</p> <p>Ask each person involved in the disagreement to paraphrase what the other person said. Go back and forth between the two parties until they have successfully restated the other's point of view.</p> <p>Then, ask a few group members, not involved in the disagreement to describe the feeling in the room triggered by their disagreement. What do these feelings say about how we, in this group, handle differences of opinion?</p>
Group discussion becomes confused, has no center, feels lifeless or tangential	<p>Let's stop for a minute to figure out where we are. What observations do you have about this discussion?</p> <p>What are you feeling right now?</p> <p>What suggestions do you have for getting things back to a more productive spot?</p>
The group arrives as a point of clarity or reaches a important consensus decision after lots of participation	<p>Before we go on, what just happened here?</p> <p>What did we accomplish? How did we do that?</p> <p>How does this feel?</p>
Someone shares a particularly poignant and relevant illustration or story	<p>Allow a quiet moment for people to take in what was said.</p> <p>If no one else says so, thank the person for his story.</p> <p>What's the meaning in what he shared? What feelings does this story trigger? Why is this important?</p>

