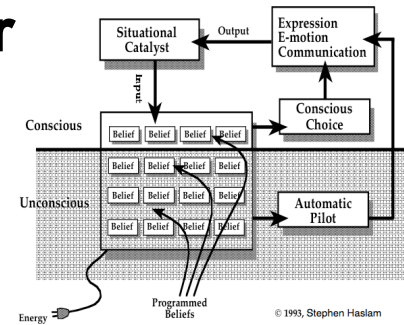


The Emotional Computer In The Workplace

By [Stephen Haslam](#) and [Robert Pennington, Ph.D.](#)
[RESOURCE INTERNATIONAL](#), Houston Texas



Why Bother?

The most common attitude toward emotions in the workplace was summed up by the character, Sergeant Joe Friday, in the old *Dragnet* television series, "The facts, mam. Just the facts." Whenever he would ask for important information, people would overflow with opinions, judgments, and their own emotional response to the situation. He and his partner, Officer Bill Gannon, would give each other a conspiratorial glance that showed how unnecessary those emotional reactions were, and he would bring the people back to their senses with his famous line, "The facts mam, just the facts."

For many years, the prevailing culture has been that emotional people do not make sense. When people are emotional, they are just not logical, and do not make rational decisions. Therefore, to be intelligent and responsible, one must suppress one's emotions. Leonard Nimoy portrayed this stereotype in his famous *Star Trek* character, Mr. Spock. Of course, Mr. Spock was from Vulcan, so he was only half human. When we suppress our emotions, we suppress an important part of ourselves that makes us a whole, living, breathing, thinking, feeling, relating person.

But today the paradigms about the value of emotions are changing. And if television programs do reflect a pulse of the psyche of the people, *Star Trek - The New Generation* presents the successor of the Mr. Spock character as an android, Mr. Data, whose personal mission in life is to become more whole by learning how to experience the wonder of emotion.

What? Is he crazy? Someone who is not burdened with the illogical, impulsive, manipulative, and overwhelming feelings that take us through the emotional roller coaster, and he wants to get on for the ride?

Whether or not we believe that emotions are appropriate in the workplace, the fact is they are experienced and expressed there. In Jack Webb's terminology, it is a fact that people have emotions, and that these emotions influence the way they behave. It might be correct to say that people's emotional reactions are in the way of getting their work done. So we have just identified an important element that affects work productivity. It would be wise to learn everything possible about that factor, so we can know what steps to take, and what steps the other person can take to effectively change the situation. There is actually a message behind each emotion. A wise person learns to treat an emotion as important information and respond to it so the reaction can subside.

*Emotions are behaviors designed to communicate
what we believe, but we are not expressing verbally.*

Goal Directed Behaviors

Most of us have learned that emotions are "feelings that happen to us," usually caused by something that someone says, or the state of the economy, or by the ambient air pressure and temperature. There are many common phrases to reveal that our emotions are not our own fault: "You made me angry!," or "He hurt my feelings." "I've got the Monday blues," or "Thank God it's Friday!"

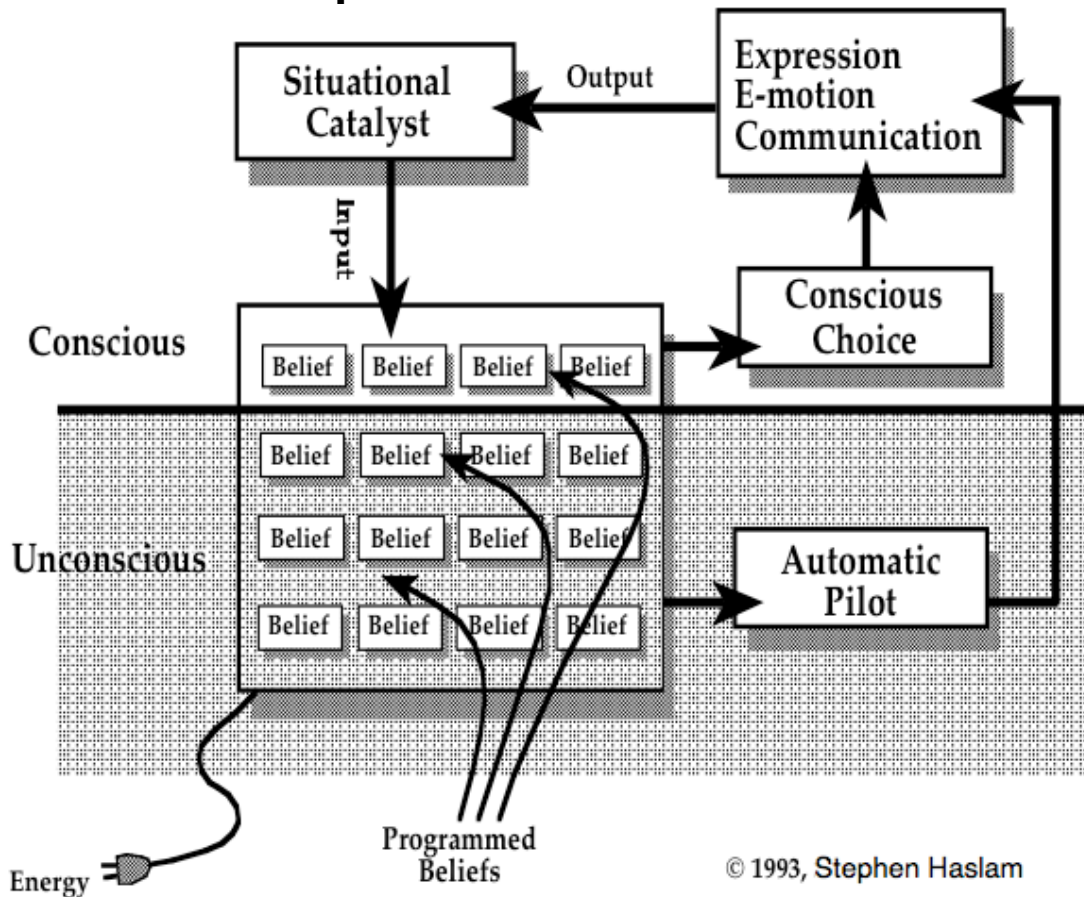
Consider how people would behave if it were true that the situation causes you to feel the way you feel. The situation is the cause, your feelings are the result. If you do not like the way you feel and you want to change it, what options do you have? One option is to leave the situation. The second option is to change the situation. *IF* the situation causes the feelings, there are no other options. But if a person does not know how to change the situation, and cannot leave it, he or she will feel helpless and stuck with a miserable emotion, and a miserable situation.

Do you know people who have stayed in a relationship longer than was healthy for them? People who feel stuck in a job they don't like? Do you know people who will sit around and complain about not having enough money, appreciation, or recognition, but will not actually do anything to change their situation? They are convinced that is just the way things are, and there is nothing they can do about it. But if the situation is the cause,

then any two people placed in the same situation would have exactly the same emotional reactions. Obviously, this is not true.

What are the factors that cause emotional diversity?

The Emotional Computer



Human beings operating like a complicated computer. We have input, storage, processing, and output. Input comes through the physical senses and is processed by the mind in the 'blink of an eye.' Both consciously and unconsciously, the mind searches through beliefs, values, and past experiences for similarities and options for how to respond. At some point a choice is made, and the computer prints out a behavior. That behavior is a statement of what one believes about the input. If I like the input and take it as a compliment, I may smile or express shyness, and my voice may take on a pleasant tone. If I feel insulted, my behavior may communicate this with aggressive anger or with suppressed "smoldering" resentment. Each behavior is designed to communicate a message about a belief, whether that message is covert or overt.

Emotions Are Communications

Many emotional communications are covert (hidden). But they are not hidden too deeply. A certain look in the eye, a suggestive body posture, a tone of voice, a careful pause. We have learned through social expectations that there are certain things we should not communicate directly, for fear of how the other people might respond. So many of these messages are communicated through emotions. Freud's great insight is that at least 90% of our beliefs are unconscious, suggesting that we are unaware of at least 90% of why we feel the way we feel.

Have you ever noticed that other people know exactly how to "push your buttons"? They seem to know exactly what to say, and how to say it to get a reaction out of you, even when you don't want to react. Somehow, they seem more in charge of how you feel than you do.

How do they know these things? Well, you told them. You may have said one day, "It really upsets me when 'so-and-so' does 'such-and-such.' And a part of them makes a mental note, "Oh, that...?" So the next time they are not getting the response from you they want, they might do 'such-and-such,' unconsciously knowing they will at least get your attention, even if it is in a negative way.

It is important to realize that suppressed experiences, beliefs, and emotions do not go away. They create unconscious habits that blurt out of our mouths and increase our blood pressure before we even have time to think. They are like computer software programs that are lost in the system. We do not know how to reprogram them, but somehow other people seem to know exactly what buttons to push to set them off. This is what it is like to live on *automatic pilot*, no longer having a choice about what we feel.

Situations do not cause us to feel what we feel. The situation is a catalyst. It is a fact. It is neutral. Our values and our beliefs about a situation determine what emotion we feel and how we express that emotion. The situation is a neutral input. The beliefs are the determining factor, and the emotion is the output that communicates the belief.

What I Become Aware of I Can Change

Emotions are natural. Emotions are communications. Your emotions communicate the thoughts and motives that cause you to act the way you do. They also communicate these things to other people. Even if you suppress your emotions, it is likely that you still send covert messages that others sense. A person who does not accept their emotions won't be able to see them. Here is an important maxim to remember:

*What I am unaware of controls me,
what I become aware of I can change.*

Whoever is more aware of emotions will more quickly learn the beliefs and meanings behind their expression. Such a person will have more information about how to influence a situation, especially when people are being emotional. This points out how important it is to consider emotions - both yours and those of others around you - as important information, especially in a conflict.

Five Simple Steps

If you are being emotional, do not try to hide it. It is likely that others will sense an emotional reaction, and if you do not clarify how you are feeling and why, they are likely to "fill in the blank" with their own perception of what you are thinking, feeling, and why you are doing this. Be clear and direct. Take responsibility for your own emotions, rather than "dumping them" on others. First, take a deep breath, reassure yourself, and follow these simple steps for communication.

1. Clearly **state the facts**, as they have occurred. Describe what literally happened, without judgment or interpretation. You may check to see if the other person is aware of these facts, and if they have other important pieces of information that need to be considered. People often put across their own beliefs as if they are objective facts. Don't. This is more likely to cause other people to not only disagree with you, but to try to make you wrong.

2. **Communicate your thoughts** about the situation. Facts are neutral. They become positive or negative, good or bad, right or wrong when you make a judgment about them. Thoughts are your subjective response to the objective facts. Through thoughts and opinions, you communicate your evaluation of the facts. This second step includes your attitudes, preferences, and opinions about the facts. Do not communicate your thoughts as if they are facts by stating an opinion like, "The fact is you are wrong!" Often, people will have less resistance to your opinions if you first clarify the objective facts, and then offer your subjective opinions as possibilities.

3. Clearly **identify your feelings or emotions**. Let the other person know they may have sensed some emotion from you, and you want to clarify. Let them know you will take responsibility for your own emotion without blaming them for it, and you still want to communicate to them what you believe is important. i.e.: I know I may be feeling angry, and I don't want that to get in the way of us working this out."

4. **State your beliefs** about the situation. Take a moment to consider your thoughts and feelings, and state what these mean to you, what is important to you and why you think and feel as you do.

5. Clearly **state what action you want** to take as a result of this discussion. State also what actions or steps you would like the other person to take. We almost always have expectations of others, as well as preferences for ourselves, and it is important to be clear about this, so we don't stay stuck in the emotion of the moment.

Using these five basic steps of communication, we can be both clear, direct, and emotional. We can begin to build relationships where openness can build trust and confidence, where emotions can be expressed openly and become a valuable part of our work and personal relationships. It is possible to be emotional and effective, only if we stop suppressing or dumping our emotions. We must begin to use them directly and responsibly. Worksheets and handouts on this and other communication models are available at: <http://www.resource-i.com/communications.html>.

The Physiology of Emotions

Dr. Candace Pert, visiting Professor at Rutgers University, and one time Chief of Brain Biochemistry at the National Institute of Health, studied the relationship between pain control and physical and emotional healing. She found that the brain creates its own morphine, and that emotional states correspond to the release of chemical "endorphins," which is shorthand for "endogenous morphines."

There is constant communication between the brain - nervous system and the cells of the body. It is as if there are tiny receptor satellite dishes all over the body, waiting for messages from the brain to be told what to do. The brain sends messenger molecules along the nerves, which are called "peptides." These messenger molecules are made up of amino acids, the body's basic building blocks, which are found not only in the brain but are stored all over the body. Endorphins are one of these peptides. These neuropeptides and their receptors are the biological equivalent of emotions.

*Endorphins are peptides, the body's natural building blocks,
and one of the biological equivalents of emotions.
They are the bridge between mind and body.*

All of these exchanges are done unconsciously, of course, and happen with blinding speed. For example, if someone steps on my toe, the brain will send these messenger molecules out along the nerves toward the toe, like radar. The receptors, like satellite dishes, receive the messengers, and send back messages along the nerves. The brain interprets the message about what has been damaged, and sends back more messengers, telling the cells how to start repairing the body. It increases the flow of blood to that area, and tells the immune system to send white blood cells to rebuild and protect from infection.

Dr. Pert believes that these neuropeptides might also be related to the experience of emotion, since they direct energy in the body. They are the bridge between mind and body. While this healing process proceeds, we also experience emotions. The first emotional response might be fear, "Oh no, my toe!" The next might be anger, "How dare they do that!", followed by embarrassment, "I'm so clumsy." These different emotions would be the

result of different information being input and processed between the mind and the body.

But Dr. Pert also points out the tendency of western culture to separate the mind from the body, as if they are independent. This goes back to a turf battle between Descartes and the Catholic Church. He agreed to focus on the physical sciences, and leave the definition of consciousness, mind, and soul to the Church. But in her studies, Dr. Pert is finding that intelligence is stored in every cell of the body. You could say that we do not have a *Body* separate from our *Mind*, we have a *Body/Mind*. And emotions act as the messenger between them

So if you suppress emotions, you will not only make your body ill, but will shut off an important part of your thinking process. It would be like building in an emergency message program into your computer to inform you of urgent action steps. Then you forget about the program. Whenever the message light starts to blink you think something is wrong with the machine. It keeps interrupting your work. You might swear at it. That does no good. It keeps blinking. You might kick the machine. Blink, blink. You might shut down your machine. Downtime. Finally, you take it to a computer doctor. He tells you what you have to do with it, but you don't understand all of that complicated computer jargon. You know you will just bring it back to the doctor the next time the computer is not working right.

Your ability to experience emotions is natural. It is unnatural and unhealthy to attempt to suppress this part of your *Body/Mind*. Emotions are good information, telling you about action you need to take in order to be effective. Suppress the message, and you will create further imbalances, which will eventually become so insistent that you will have to turn your attention to them.

The more "logical" thing would be to listen to the information, and seek to understand what is behind the message. In fact, it is not logical to suppress or deny emotions.

Tell that to Mr. Spock.

For more information:



[Dr Rob Pennington](#)

If these approaches make sense, then consider contacting Rob and Stephen to discuss how they could help your organization. Contact them at 713-305-5117 or get more information on their web site at: www.resource-i.com



[Stephen Haslam](#)