

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

MOOD AND PRODUCTIVITY: UNDOING A BAD START

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributors:

- Nancy Rothbard, *David Pottruck Associate Professor of Management*, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

THE GOAL:

Enhance productivity and performance by acknowledging and resetting negative moods that are brought to work.

NANO TOOL:

A recent study indicates that waking up on the right or wrong side of the bed can have persistent effects: employees who bring negative emotions to work not only tend to stay in a bad mood throughout the day, but their productivity falls by over 10 percent. The old “leave it at the door” adage simply doesn’t work for the majority of people. However, there are steps leaders can take to counteract those moods, reverse the productivity drain, and increase performance levels.

Resetting negative moods can be achieved using a variety of methods. Engagement works — ignoring the situation doesn’t. For higher productivity and improved performance, acknowledge the problem, make some slight accommodations, and offer options. It can pay dividends to create a culture where walking in the door of the office leads to a more positive mood at the start of the day.

HOW IT WORKS:

- **Develop shared practices.** The Ritz-Carlton corporate team establishes an emotional tie with the rest of the company’s employees through daily stand-up meetings designed to align values and boost mood. At Quicken Loans, President and CEO Dan Gilbert spreads Quickenisms to boost moods. The motivational and entertaining slogans, including “You’ll see it when you believe it” and “A penny saved is a penny,” are repeated throughout the company by Gilbert’s devoted employees.
- **Relax meetings.** The creator of the 3M Meeting Network, Management Consultant Michael Begeman, says to begin meetings with five or ten minutes of scheduled “open time,” in which you socialize and check in with others. He suggests asking them to share anything that’s distracting them, to both help them move past a bad mood and to be better focused on the meeting’s agenda. Begeman also brings toys, such as squeeze balls and Slinkies, to meetings and encourages people to play with them.
- **Feed people.** At CHG Healthcare, one of Fortune magazine’s 100 best companies to work for in 2010 and 2011, CEO Michael Weinholtz provides a basket of fresh fruit each morning for his employees. Small business president Todd Warren also knows the power of food; it’s common to find his VP making breakfast on heavily scheduled days, or their office manager baking cookies when stress levels get high.
- **Introduce communication rituals.** Co-founder of The Ken Blanchard Companies, a management training and consulting firm, Ken Blanchard leaves a voicemail message for every employee every day. His subjects cover a wide

range, but his message is always positive and inspirational. Health care company Amedysis used daily e-mails during an Employee Training Week to deliver feature articles, celebrations of accomplishments, and quotes from people within the organization.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **Take steps** to lose your own negativity before you arrive at work by creating an intentional transition. You can't reap the benefits of positivity if you're not exhibiting it yourself. That might mean stopping for a coffee, listening to favorite music, or taking the "scenic route." It's not just a "feel good" strategy — it can make you more productive and set the stage for making a more positive impression.
2. **Institutionalize** a positive transition to work for your team. Follow one of the examples above, or consider holding quick morning motivational gatherings, or sending an e-mail to each employee with a positive thought, goal, or feedback. This can proactively counteract negative moods and avoid the productivity drain.
3. **Pay attention** to the person's mood and give negative feedback at a time when they may be more receptive. For example, when an employee arrives a few minutes late, showing immediate frustration will likely exacerbate a bad mood, sending the employee into a negative spiral, and resulting in lowered productivity and compromised job performance. Moreover, the employee is less likely to hear, process, and benefit from the feedback at that time. Waiting for a more appropriate time to discuss the issue will help, both in terms of your own emotional reaction to the issue as well as the employee's ability to hear and discuss the feedback.
4. **Listen to and engage with employees.** Adapt a flexible approach to help them reverse a negative mood, and gain greater commitment and loyalty in the process.

SHARE YOUR BEST PRACTICES:

Do you have a best practice for reversing a negative mood at the start of a day? If so, please share it on our blog at Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management.

<http://whartonleadership.wordpress.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- "Waking Up on the Right or Wrong Side of the Bed: Start-of-workday Mood, Work Events, Employee Affect, and Performance," Nancy P. Rothbard and Steffanie L. Wilk, *Academy of Management Journal*, In press.
- "[Waking Up on the Wrong Side of the Desk: The Effect of Mood on Work Performance.](#)" Nancy Rothbard and Steffanie Wilk, *Knowledge@Wharton*, July 26, 2006.
- Nancy Rothbard teaches in the Wharton Executive Education programs [High-Potential Leaders: Accelerating Your Impact](#) and [Creating and Leading High-Performing Teams](#).

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director, Professor Adam Grant.