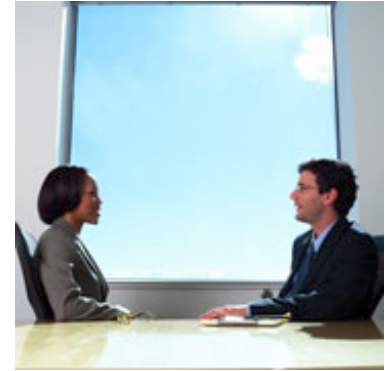




Looking to Make a Sale or Get Promoted? Emotions Will Help Determine the Outcome

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High emotion contributes to great opera. It does not, however, serve us well when making judgments about others. This is the argument advanced in "Feeling and Believing: The Influence of Emotion on Trust," a new paper by [Maurice E. Schweitzer](#), Wharton professor of operations and information management, and Jennifer Dunn, a PhD student in the department.



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The two researchers conducted five experiments to determine the influence of emotional states -- happiness, gratitude, anger, and guilt -- on trust. Each experiment confirmed that incidental emotions (emotions from one situation that influence judgment in a following, unrelated situation) affect how willing we are to trust others. For example, our anger over a speeding ticket is likely to affect how we judge someone later in the day. The researchers conclude that despite feeling we are rational beings who make clear, lucid judgments, in reality we all walk around in a sea of emotions that are likely to influence how we act in both business and social contexts.

The article, recently published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, stems from Schweitzer's ongoing interest in negotiation, where trust plays a critical role. Previous research identified trust as a combination of two constructs: one's own propensity to trust and one's knowledge about the other person. "This research suggests that we make a cognitive decision and use reason to decide whether or not to trust someone," notes Schweitzer. "What our research says is that trust is much more labile than that." In other words, trust is a constructed judgment that is influenced by irrelevant information. "The extent to which I do or do not trust you is a function not only of how trusting a person I am and what I know about you, but also a function of irrelevant events that have influenced my emotional state. For example, if I hit a parked car, argued with my spouse, learned that I have to pay a large repair bill (or won an award, had a paper accepted, or saw my stock account grow) beforehand, I would trust you less (or more). The main idea in the paper is that emotions which are irrelevant to the judgment task nevertheless influence trust judgments in predictable ways," Schweitzer says.

He and Dunn demonstrated this through a series of experiments, each one designed to test a different aspect of the "emotions affect trust" theory. In one study, for example, he and his team approached people waiting for trains and asked if they would be willing to take part in a study. They were asked to name a co-worker and then -- after an "emotion induction" phase -- answer a series of questions about that person. In the "emotion induction" phase, participants recounted in writing an incident that made them angry, sad, or happy (depending on which emotion they were assigned). Participants wrote about events like the birth of a child (happiness), the untimely death of a loved one (sadness), or the destructive behavior of a neighbor (anger). After this exercise, participants rated their co-workers on such statements as: "If X promised to copy a presentation for me, s/he would follow through," and "X would never intentionally misrepresent my point of view to others." Results showed that happy participants were significantly more trusting than were sad participants, and sad participants were significantly more trusting than were angry participants. Throughout each of the five studies, the results were the same. "What surprised me most was the magnitude and consistency of the effects," says Schweitzer.

A "Simple Manipulation"

For managers, this study reveals much about human nature, he suggests. "We can easily channel people and direct them to a happy, sad or angry place ... in a relatively short period of time with a relatively simple manipulation." These manipulations can take the form of a short story (e.g., a news story), a short movie clip, or even a short discussion. For example, the best salespeople "don't call on a customer and start with a comment about the stock market dropping or a favorite sports team losing. Instead, they focus attention on something uplifting," like a team making the playoffs or an upcoming holiday.

"In negotiation, we have always known that non-task communication -- discussion that's not directly relevant to the negotiation process -- is important for closing a deal," says Schweitzer. "This research gives us some insight into why it's important and what kinds of things should go into that communication." Specifically, "non-task communication, like telling jokes/stories or talking about sports, can change people's emotional states and make them more (or less) trusting. My advice is to give serious thought to non-task communication. This includes preparing the types of stories you tell and the types of non-task questions you ask. It also includes learning more about a client, such as whether he/she is a huge Red Sox fan or cares a lot about wildlife refuges. Conversely, you should recognize that when a salesperson or someone else engages in a conversation like this, he or she may influence your emotional state and subsequently your 'trust judgment'. The reason you gave someone a large contract may have more to do with how funny the story he told you beforehand was than with his reputation for dependability."

So going in to ask for a promotion or new responsibilities on the job is probably a good time to recount a funny story or ask about your supervisor's golf game, Schweitzer says. The point is to recognize the role that emotions play. Outside events -- such as the rise/fall of IBM stock if your supervisor owns it, or whether his or her child got accepted into a prestigious college -- as well as non-task communication, like telling a funny story, are important for trust judgments.

That's not to say we should never acknowledge problems that occur outside of the work setting, Schweitzer adds. "You have to demonstrate sensitivity." If a colleague is going through a difficult time personally, you should acknowledge it, but not dwell on it. "Our research shows that you can shift people to think about happy things and make them -- literally -- happy."

What Schweitzer and Dunn don't know is how long these incidental emotions last. The research tested people's propensity to trust immediately after the emotion induction (putting people into a happy, sad, or angry mood). Schweitzer is now working on a series of tests to determine the durability of these emotions: Do they last for minutes, hours, days or weeks? The results should help fill out the picture of how emotions affect our judgments.

Being Aware of Your Emotions

A second key finding in the study is that if people are *aware* of their emotional state, then the emotional state does not generally bleed into their judgments of others. In one study, for example, participants were shown film clips to induce either happiness or anger. Participants in the "happy" group watched a Robin Williams comedy routine, while those in the "anger" group watched a clip from the film *Witness*, in which teenagers harass an Amish man. After watching the clips, half of those in the "happy" group saw a brief note on screen that read, "Prior research has shown that even short film clips like the ones you have seen can influence people's emotions." The other half saw a blank screen. This was duplicated in the "angry" group. Consistent with the other study, angry participants provided significantly lower trust ratings than happy participants among those who *did not* receive the warning message. Among those who viewed the warning message, trust levels were about the same.

Again, says Schweitzer, links to the business world are clear, in particular because the results speak directly to the issue of "emotional intelligence," a widely discussed concept in recent years. "Managers and employees alike need to realize that when making decisions, they are in a state that is driven partly by

reason, but also partly by emotion," he notes. Taking into account the role of awareness, managers can keep an eye out for employees who are at risk for bringing unrelated emotions to critical decisions. For example, a manager in a law firm may need to pull another lawyer aside and say, "I know case X isn't going well, but case Y is different," or "I know you're going through a difficult divorce, but don't let that cloud your judgment when you go into your negotiations today." Says Schweitzer: "When people recognize the trigger, or source, of their emotions they are less likely to misattribute them. When I realize that I'm angry because of something my spouse did, I am less likely to use that anger in an unrelated judgment. When I am not aware of or thinking about why I am angry, I am more likely to misattribute it."

Unattributed emotions are a problem, he points out, particularly for people working in high-stress, fast-paced jobs, like judges and parole officers, who have to make quick judgments about people. Because they move from one incident to the next without the luxury of time to sit back and gauge their emotions, they are more likely to misattribute emotional states. Again, awareness and correct attribution of emotional states can help manage this process, he suggests.

Based on his work in the field, Schweitzer thinks people conceive of themselves as rational human beings driven by rational thought -- particularly Westerners -- but it's not true. "People undervalue the extent to which emotions influence their judgment," he says. Correctly attributing our emotional states can counter the effects of others who are trying to manipulate our feelings. "Good sales people tell jokes and funny stories; they bring little gifts. What they are trying to do is influence people's emotional states." Recognizing that this person is trying to make you feel good can help separate the good feelings from the decisions at hand. Are you feeling you can trust these new partners and sign on the dotted line because it's a solid deal or because you are ecstatic over your new baby? "This is what we need to be aware of," says Schweitzer.

The highly emotional people in the crowd shouldn't feel too bad, he adds, noting that our quick emotional reactions have served us well for the past 100,000 years. Our ancestors who happened upon a snarling, big-toothed animal were smart to listen to their emotions and run the other way. "Actually, it's only been fairly recently that we can or should override those emotional reactions," he says. In other words, going into battle mode may not be the best response to a large, scary-looking person coming toward you at work. Especially if it's your boss.

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