

This month's 5 x Harvard Management Tips

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Tip No 1 - Regulate Your Emotions During a Negotiation

You're in the middle of a heated negotiation with your colleague. You want to come across as confident, but inside you feel timid. During these difficult situations, there are actually two conversations happening at the same time. One is obvious: It's the conversation you're having *with someone else*. The other is the conversation you're having *within yourself* about how willing and able you are to stretch outside your comfort zone. To negotiate successfully, you need to question your position in *both* conversations. When you're negotiating with someone else, look beyond your stated position to find commonalities. And when you're negotiating with yourself, your "position" might be that you're unwilling to be more assertive. Dig a little deeper and ask yourself why. Is it an emotional challenge? Are you afraid of being assertive? Or is it a skill-based challenge? Getting to the bottom of why you're unwilling to step outside your comfort zone is the first step in becoming a better negotiator.

Adapted from "The Two Conversations You're Having When You Negotiate," by Andy Molinsky

Tip No 2 - Respond to Complicated Emails First Thing in the Morning

We've been warned repeatedly that it's a bad idea to start your day by checking email — it hurts your productivity and focus. But waiting until later in the day to tackle your inbox actually presents a different problem: Email that requires you to make difficult decisions often doesn't get answered. Research has shown that our decision-making capacity is finite and declines throughout the day. So the longer you wait to respond to that tricky email, the harder it's going to be. To counteract decision fatigue, try to tackle your most complicated emails first thing in the morning. Set aside 20–25 minutes when your mind is clearest. Doing so will allow you to finally respond to those emails that are languishing at the bottom of your inbox.

Adapted from "Actually, You Should Check Email First Thing in the Morning," by Dorie Clark

Tip No 3 - Get the Crowd to Weigh In on Strategic Decisions

In most organizations authority for the most important strategic decisions is left to the highest-paid person's opinion (HiPPO). But relying on the judgement of one person or a few individuals is bound to lead to trouble. HiPPOs often are wrong, due to inherent biases, misinformation, and other types of noise that can cloud one person's opinion. To cancel out much of that noise, companies should integrate crowd voting into their decision-making strategies. Crowd voting integrates the expertise, knowledge, and perspectives of many people. These opinions can help shape a more well-rounded frame of reference, and can vastly improve the chances that a strategic decision will lead to success. Crowd voting doesn't render HiPPOs obsolete; rather, it encourages HiPPOs to work *with* the crowd in order to develop more-successful strategies.

Adapted from "The Antidote to HiPPOs: Crowd Voting," by Karim R. Lakhani

Tip No 4 - The Best Way to Solve Recurring Work Problems

Problems at work tend to be repetitive. No one complains because their boss was angry one time or a colleague failed to pitch in once. The next time you're in a familiar noxious work setting where someone is doing the same thing as usual, try something different: improvise. Break the routine. For example, if you have an employee who's chronically late to meetings and reprimanding her in the past hasn't solved the problem, the next time she's late, stop the meeting and praise her for all that she's doing right. Everyone will be caught off guard, and it may actually resolve the problem once and for all. By introducing an unfamiliar dynamic, you encourage your counterpart to respond differently in turn.

Adapted from "To Fix a Chronic Problem, Try Winging It," by Michael Lipson

Tip No 5 - How to Fake the Confidence You Need

When you're feeling overwhelmed and in over your head, the best way to power through is to pretend you've got the confidence you need to get something done. These strategies can help you fake it 'til you make it:

- **Think positively.** The more you focus on what's scary about the challenge, the more intimidated you'll feel. Try framing your new team, project, or initiative not as a threat but as an opportunity to do something new.
- **Watch and learn.** Observe how others lead. Pay attention to how they use humor, silence, and charisma to influence others — then tailor those tactics to your individual style.
- **Use bold body language.** Take long strides. Sit up straight. Walk with your chest held high. Don't slouch. Carrying yourself in a way that conveys power, poise, and healthy pride helps you feel more self-assured, which comes across to others.

Adapted from "How to Fake It When You're Not Feeling Confident," by Rebecca Knight