

Taking our emotional masks off

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Recently, two separate but apparently connected events led me to think about how we sometimes **wear masks when we interact with others**. Therefore, in this issue of "Leading with Emotional Intelligence", I'd like to invite you to reflect on this topic.

Do you feel that you are sometimes wearing a mask when interacting with others? Do you at times feel that it harms you in some way? What would be the benefits of removing this mask?

The first event that happened was during a training course. I was doing an exercise I like a lot, which I call the "Emotional landscape". I invited participants to use pictures from magazines to present their "emotional landscape", that is, how they feel on a typical day at work.

Then a successful, energetic and friendly executive presented his "emotional landscape". In the middle of his landscape was a picture of a laughing face, and he presented it as how he usually interacts with other people.

To me, the picture he chose really looked like a mask. As I shared my perception of his picture, he started to realize that indeed there were several emotions that he did not allow himself to express at work, like frustration or anger.

Then he went on a courageous and moving piece of personal work, leading him to the conclusion that he wanted to express more of these emotions. I saw the excitement and drop in tension created by this insight.

A few days later, a fellow trainer invited me to a workshop on removing our masks that took place right in the evening of the day I met her. What a coincidence, I thought.

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Wearing a mask means not allowing ourselves to express some emotions that are part of us. For some people, it is fear or worry, for others, frustration or anger.

There are certainly reasons for wearing a mask. Sometimes, we think that if we express fully our emotions, people will dislike us. While this can happen, it is more likely that people will appreciate us more for expressing fully our emotions, as we will see below.

But what is the risk of not expressing our emotions, of wearing a mask? There are mainly two:

- We may create some extra tension for ourselves as we try hard not to release our emotions.
- People may perceive us as not really genuine, or suspect us of having some hidden agenda. Masks are nice to be used in a party. However, at work, people don't really enjoy seeing them on their colleagues' faces.

I really encourage you to have a look at some emotions that you may leave unexpressed, especially those that you experience on a regular basis.

Awareness of these unexpressed emotions is already half of the way. The other half of the way is to practice expressing these emotions. This may be a bit uncomfortable at first, taking you out of your comfort zone. A pinch of diplomacy might also be needed.

At the same time, there is a lot to gain in taking our masks off.

First, it gives us a chance to feel more relaxed, getting rid of the tension created by holding back emotions. Also, communicating with others with our full emotional landscape can make us feel more whole and more true to ourselves, which is a great feeling.

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Secondly, there are good chances that our colleagues will appreciate us more as a genuine and congruent person - a person that they can trust.

The good news is that you don't have to throw your mask away after removing it. You can always use it for parties.

I wish you more and more rich relationships with your colleagues.

Warmly,

Sebastien



Sebastien Henry is **Progress-U's expert for Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and stress management**. He works with executives who would like to:

- avoid feeling exhausted and uprooted as their career takes them to the top;
- become more inspiring leaders by developing their Emotional Intelligence (EQ) at work; and, as a consequence,
- be able to motivate their people more and retain the best.

Sebastien is convinced that leaders who know how to strengthen and use their Emotional Intelligence can make a big difference in their respective organizations because they are leaders for whom people want to commit and give their best.

Sebastien worked in an Asia-Pacific regional position at a multinational company and has also worked with Japanese and Chinese teams in Tokyo and Shanghai, respectively. His experience allowed him to practice the art of leading and listening across cultures and to experiment extensively on how to develop Emotional Intelligence in his daily work life. He is currently writing a book on this topic.

His articles on Emotional Intelligence in Leadership have been published in Human Resources and South China Morning Post.

Sebastien draws the tools he uses and shares from several areas of his life: his business experience as a corporate executive, his intensive practice of mountaineering and rock climbing (7a on-sight and more than 50 alpine routes), his involvement in teaching and coaching prisoners, and his daily meditations for more than six years.

He has coached several high-ranking executives, including an Asia/Pacific General Manager, a Country General Manager, and Department Heads.

His native language is French, but he also speaks and writes in Mandarin, English, and Japanese.

His credentials include:

- MBA, BA in Psychology, BA in Philosophy,
- Certified NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner,
- Certified NLP Trainer (NLPU, USA),
- Certified Coach (ICC),
- More than 40 days of training with the Gestalt approach at the Paris School of Gestalt,
- Certified Trainer of the "EQ Impact Learning" program (Talentsmart, USA).

Sebastien gives one-to-one executive coaching, key note speeches, and group seminars and workshops.

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