

# Author makes complex ideas easy in 'It's Always Personal'

Let's not forget that small emotions are the great captains of our lives."

As the reader soon discovers, Vincent van Gogh's opening sentiment succinctly captures what follows in "It's Always Personal: Emotion in the New Workplace," the new best-seller by Anne Kreamer.

"On average, it takes greater provocation to make women outwardly express their anger than it does to make men do so, and when they do let it out, they experience greater distress," Kreamer explains in "The Anger Epidemic," a chapter devoted to dissecting gender differences in how hostile emotional displays at work are often experienced and interpreted. "So in spite of how pervasive displays of anger are in our culture, men and, yes, women remain highly disapproving of angry women on the job."

"Women are expected to be empathetic, caring, nurturing people, and when we don't conform to that not entirely illegitimate stereotype and actually show anger, we risk our professional standing," she adds.

"It's Always Personal" is constructed around two national surveys conducted by Kreamer and her colleagues. Initially, the Emotional Incidents in the Workplace Survey was administered to 701 respondents between the ages of 18 and

64; men and women were represented more or less equally in the sample, which also included the full range of occupational levels across both the public and private sectors. The EIWS is designed to reveal what kinds of emotions are typically on display in the contemporary work environment. Some of the key findings included the revelations that frustration is the primary emotion most Americans (73 percent) experience at work, more men (42 percent) see expressions of anger as an effective management strategy than do women (23 percent), and that whether or not someone cries at work seems to have no bearing on their overall job satisfaction.

"Not surprisingly, we found the largest differential in emotional expressiveness to be the gap between younger women and older men," Kreamer explains. "Women under 45 are 10 times more likely to cry at work than men 45 and older."

The results of the EIWS became the basis for the development of a new instrument, the Workplace Emotion Evaluation Profile, or the WEEP. Essentially, the WEEP is built on the same theoretical framework at the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a relatively well-known personality inventory introduced shortly after the end of World War II. In the second phase of their research, Kreamer and her team administered the WEEP to 1,239 workers (818 women and 421 men), again from all levels of the organizational hierarchy – top management through front-line employees – from a wide cross section of industries.

The WEEP was specifically created to measure two dimensions that extend beyond the sensitivity of the MBTI. First, it is designed to assess how

someone processes strong emotions in general; i.e., how an individual internally deals with and externally expresses their feelings. Second, it examines the consequences of emotional behavior in the workplace. In other words, what emotional outbursts tend to precipitate and mean to you and others in the organization.

Using the results of the WEEP, Kreamer was able to categorize most workers into four distinct types. Spouters, who constitute about 21 percent of the

workforce, tend to cry at work more than any other group, although they see themselves as being more in tune with what's really going on there. Accepters (39 percent of the working population) are detail-oriented and tend to keep their feelings under wraps. They seldom feel in control and are often unable to express emotion even when circumstances call for such. Believers (27 percent) do not articulate quite as much feeling at work as Spouters do, but they can have a calming effect on co-workers who are more emotional; i.e., they seem to be good at helping co-workers overcome stressful situations and move forward.

Solvers – the smallest group consisting of only about 13 percent of the workforce – tend to be very good at working under pressure, although they do tend

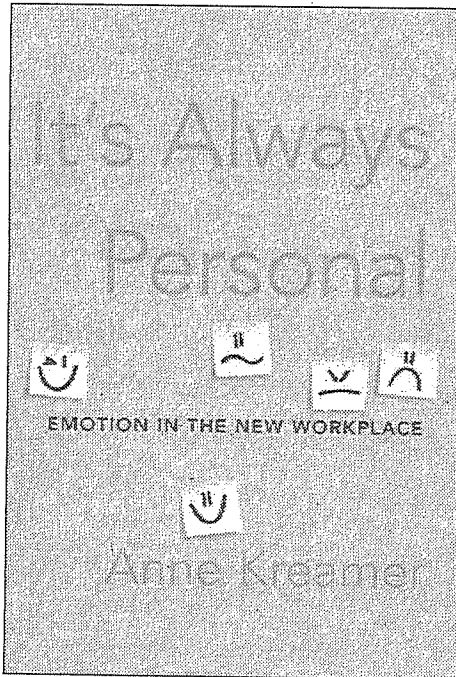
to be difficult to influence once they have made up their minds about an issue. Solvers are relatively comfortable expressing their feelings at work and are generally supportive when others become emotional. Interestingly, more CEOs and business owners belong to this group than the other three previously mentioned.

For the record, Kreamer is a former vice president and creative director of Nickelodeon; she has also been a columnist for Fast Company and Martha Stewart Living. A graduate of Harvard College, her last book was "Going Gray: What I Learned about Beauty, Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity and Everything Else that Really Matters."

I enjoyed this book a great deal. It is very well-researched and the writing style makes it readily accessible to both a broad audience as well as the more academically oriented. Even though Kreamer delves deeply into the psychological realm, she explains complex concepts and relationships in an exceptionally clear and straightforward manner. The real-world examples she infuses throughout the book's 12 chapters also help the reader to instantly relate to the various points she is continually making.

"Understanding the truths that neuroscience is revealing will allow us greater awareness and thus control of the emotions that shape our decisions and behavior at work," Kreamer concludes. "The prospect of that happening makes me so happy I could cry."

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.



"It's Always Personal: Emotion in the New Workplace" by Anne Kreamer. New York: Random Hours, 2011, 234 pages, \$25.