

What is emotional labor?

We're using it in the 'Metafilter Thread' context (see

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0UUYL6kaNeBTDBRbkJkeUtabEk/view?pref=2&pli=1> for the condensed version, at 70 pages).

It's the unpaid labor of caring and paying attention, and planning and doing 'all the things'.

Examples include:

- Organizing birthday cakes, cards, condolence visits, etc at the office
- Taking notes, counting chairs, making sure there's coffee and snacks for a meeting when that's not your job (or, being leaned on to do it when it's not your job)
- The effort you have to expend in projecting an aura of cheerful helpfulness at all times, even in the face of distressing or degrading interactions
- Troubleshooting the 'human side' when things go wrong, such as thinking through how to help a colleague who is injured on a remote worksite, when that's not your job
- The energy you expend tending to others' well-being, concerns, angst

Why is it harmful?

- When it comes to 'maintaining a positive demeanor', that aspect of emotional labor is harmful in several ways:
 - It undermines the legitimacy of your emotions and is unhealthy
 - It doesn't address what may be an abusive or inappropriate situation
 - It creates a toxic workplace culture where people perceive they cannot point out problems or issues lest they be seen as having a 'bad attitude', and where bad behavior is allowed to persist
 - It's tone policing and sexist/racist ('resting bitchface' 'angry black man')
- When it comes to being expected to 'do all the things', that's also harmful in several ways:
 - It fosters a culture where only *some* people are expected to treat others thoughtfully and with respect
 - It turfs women to 'women's roles' (get the coffee, bring treats) regardless of their actual position/duties on a team, and in doing so undermines their authority and respect for their expertise and skillset

How can you push back against expectations of emotional labor?

- Stop the reflexive 'sorry'. That sorry reinforces that you have responsibility for something.
- Work with your company to create a system for recognizing birthdays, anniversaries, etc; this system must involve a diverse set of people to 'fulfill' it. It cannot fall strictly to 'low woman on the totem pole'.
- If you're asked to check the coffee/restock the snacks, and there's someone else in the room whose role it is, say so. "Thanks for pointing that out. Chad is the coordinator for this meeting and responsible for that. I'll alert him."

For those in leadership positions:

- Identify places of 'emotional labor' risk- like travel/offsite. Develop clear, comprehensive policies to address situations like employees getting injured or traveling to new-to-them regions, and communicate expectations to staff.
- Develop a working group focused on 'fun' activities like holiday parties or summer picnics, and make sure this group is not all women nor all entry level positions.
- Push back if you receive feedback complaining that female employees 'don't say hi' or 'don't seem friendly all the time' or 'should smile more'. Make it clear that you consider an employee to be focused on her job as more important than her reaching a vague standard of sufficiently friendly.
- Make sure your corporate values statement addresses that there is a company-wide expectation of these so-called 'soft skills'. Stating it explicitly means all can be held responsible.
- Talk openly about emotional labor as 'real' work that can lead to overload. Acknowledge those on your team who are naturally adept at carrying emotional labor and check in with them. Don't abuse team members with high EQ.
 - Stay away from not only gendering but diminishing task descriptors (Den Mother, 'Wendy to the Lost Boys', Camp Counselor, Cruise Director) if it's work that needs to be done for the team, it is at the same weight as any other task
 - For travelling teams, institute policies involving team members being responsible for their own 'chores' (Travel booking, Expenses, Visas, etc.) or maintain consistent support to all travel roles. If it's one person's job to be the team driver/contact who does the responsibility fall to when that person is ill?