Communicating With Highly Sensitive People
Highly sensitive people make up about one-third of the American workforce.
NOTES

We’ll discuss:

✓ Understanding the triggers of highly sensitive people
✓ The link between neurodiversity and high degrees of sensitivity
✓ The strengths that highly sensitive people can bring to the table
✓ Exploring the sensitivity spectrum and determining where people fall on it
✓ Knowing what NOT to say, especially early in a work relationship
NOTES

We’ll discuss:

- Evaluating your current work environment for all types of people
- One easy language tweak to improve interactions with highly sensitive employees
- Develop an action plan to help empower your sensitive employees
- Helping highly sensitive employees become more resilient
What is a “highly-sensitive person”?

The highly sensitive person needs only a little input to register a big effect on their internal state of mind and body.

People with ADHD can be easily distracted and unable to focus.

Those with misophonia can experience a fight-or-flight response.
Neurodiversity and emotional sensitivity: The effects aren’t always physical

Neurodiverse conditions can also heighten emotional sensitivity

People on the autism spectrum can be highly sensitive to certain sounds or textures as well.
“As a personality trait, being sensitive means you take in more information from the world around you. Sensitive people are wired at a brain level to process all information that comes in at a deeper level. They invest more mental resources and spend longer time thinking and reflecting on things.”

— Andre Sólo
NOTES

- 30% of people score high for sensitivity
- 40% having average sensitivity
- 30% of people have low levels of sensitivity

- Unsocial
- Insecure
- Fearful
- Neurotic
- Depressed
- Anxious
30% of people score high for sensitivity

40% having average sensitivity

30% of people have low levels of sensitivity

- Strong perfume
- Loud noises
- Workplace drama
- Chaos
- Fluorescent lights
Key Traits of a Highly Sensitive Person

- May be easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input
- Affected by other people’s moods
- Difficulty letting go of negative thoughts or emotions
NOTES

Strengths of Highly Sensitive People

Empathy
Strengths of Highly Sensitive People

Creativity

The ability to blend observations and perceptions in fresh ways.
Sensory intelligence

Quickly grasp what’s happening around them and respond before the competition
**Strengths of Highly Sensitive People**

*Depth of processing*

Often see pattern others don’t see and can “connect the dots”
**Strengths** of Highly Sensitive People

- Depth of emotion
- Great listeners, trusted co-workers

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Understanding What Triggers Highly Sensitive People

1. Jokes, especially when it’s about them
2. Criticism
3. Disagreeing with them
4. Strong tone of voice or aggressive language
Understanding What Triggers Highly Sensitive People

- **5** Turmoil
- **6** Strong sensory input
- **7** Labeling
- **8** Micromanaging
Exploring the sensitivity spectrum and determining where people fall on it
Where do you fall on the spectrum?

1. What happens to your energy or how do you feel when you are exposed to a negative comment?

2. What happens to your energy or how do you feel about office politics or drama?

3. What happens when you hear gossip related to you?
Where do you fall on the spectrum?

4. How do you feel or what happens to your energy when jokes are based on you?

5. How do you react when you are given criticism or feedback?

6. What happens when you are exposed to other people that are moody? What happens to your energy or how do you feel?
7. What happens to your energy when you drink caffeine?

8. What happens or how do you feel when exposed to loud noises?

9. What happens to your energy or how do you feel when you are pressured with a deadline?
Where do you fall on the spectrum?

How did you score?

- Consider where you and other employees are on the spectrum.
- Realize that not everyone is alike.
NOTES

Avoiding Offense by Knowing What NOT to Say

Caution is your friend.
Hidden Triggers: Even People Who Aren’t Highly Sensitive Have Them

Any broad generational jabs
Hidden Triggers: Even People Who Aren’t Highly Sensitive Have Them

- Any broad generational jabs
- Intrusive comments about the way they look, speak or dress
Hidden Triggers: Even People Who Aren’t Highly Sensitive Have Them

- Any broad generational jabs
- Intrusive comments about the way they look, speak or dress
- “You’ve got to be tough to work here.”
Hidden Triggers: Even People Who Aren’t Highly Sensitive Have Them

- “I’m sorry you took it that way.”
- “I was only joking.”
- “I’m just brutally honest sometimes.”
Evaluating Your Current Work Environment

- Providing a quiet workspace for someone with misophonia
- Giving someone with ADD or ADHD a quiet place to work with fewer distractions
- Providing non-fluorescent lighting for someone adversely affected by fluorescent light
- Allowing someone on the autism spectrum more control over their work environment to minimize triggering stimuli
Evaluating Your Current Work Environment

- Work on a case-by-case basis
- Provide an accepting and responsive work culture
Evaluating Your Current Work Environment

Ergonomic tweaks can help your employees be more productive.
In the office, allow your employees to work where they might be most productive.
Evaluating Your Current Work Environment

Minimize office politics.
One Easy Communication Tweak to Improve Interactions With Highly Sensitive Employees

Instead of “you” statements

Use “I,” “we,” and “us” statements

Can be interpreted as criticism.

More collaborative
Empowering Your Highly Sensitive Employees to Achieve Even More Success
NOTES

Allow them to work alone.
Allow them to work in the office full or part-time.
Encourage them to start the workday with a clean workspace.
Provide them with an opportunity to take a course on time management.
When it comes to change, give them as much notice and information as you can in advance.
Help them address the sources of their stress.
Encourage self-awareness.
What happens when one person’s sensitivity becomes a problem for others?

Exhaust all reasonable accommodations and consult with HR or an employment lawyer before making decisions with lasting consequences.
NOTES

What happens when one person’s sensitivity becomes a problem for others?

One in seven (Gen Z) children and young adults are dealing with mental health issues.

Difficulty in dealing with challenges is not confined to any conveniently labeled generation.
Three steps you can take to help highly sensitive workers better deal with adversity

1. Give praise that’s due, not overdone
2. Provide employees with “adversity coaching”
3. Model the resilience you want to see
Empathy goes a long way toward helping sensitive people fit in better at work

It’s vital to create a company culture where people are supported, not despite their high sensitivity, but because of the benefits that sensitivity can provide

Making accommodations for highly sensitive people isn’t just a good idea; in some cases, it’s the law

Even the most sensitive people can learn resilience, with the right guidance
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