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# Research Digest

## Increase Self-Esteem, Decrease Escalation

Why is it that when some people dig themselves into a hole, they ask for more shovels? This escalation of commitment can be costly for the individual — and society — whether the context is litigation, work stoppage, or, worst of all, war.

A recent study suggests that people's tendency to escalate or deescalate is connected to self-esteem. The authors' research focuses on how increasing an individual's self-esteem following a poor decision can help decrease escalation. They created three scenarios employing three different manipulations of self-affirmation and two different measures of escalation using university students as volunteers.

Niro Sivanathan, Daniel Moden, Adam Galinsky, and Gillian Ku found that affirming self-esteem can have a dual effect. Self-affirmations can alleviate the threats resulting from having made a poor decision when an individual is allowed to reflect on important personal values or is praised for a skill not related to the poor decision. But if the specific skill that created the failing action was called into question, the conflict escalated.

The study offers some practical advice for organizations by providing a way to use the self-affirmation process to restore an employee's self-worth and prevent escalation after a bad decision is made.

**Source:** Sivanathan, N., D. C. Moden, A. D Galinsky, and G. Ku. 2008. The promise and peril of self-affirmation in de-escalation of commitment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 107(1): 1-14.

## Can We Shake on That?

Negotiations often end with a handshake — sometimes they begin with them as well.

A recent experiment examined the relationship between a firm handshake and job interview ratings. The findings suggest that it may be particularly important for women in forming a positive first impression.

Much research has been done on the impact of such nonverbal cues as eye contact and smiling, but little research has been done on the handshake. Greg Stewart, Susan Dustin, Murray Barrick, and Todd Darnold set up mock interviews with human resources representatives and assessed

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handshake firmness at five different times by five different raters. The raters were trained in handshake evaluation and in how to code each participant's handshake. The results found a relationship between the relative firmness of the handshake and the degree to which the interviewer's evaluation was positive.

Although women generally received less firm handshake ratings, they received somewhat higher interviewer ratings. The results also demonstrated, however, that a woman's low handshake rating can add to a negative overall interviewer evaluation.

The authors conclude that a strong handshake can benefit women even more than men. While men and women with weak handshakes received almost identical results for employment suitability, a woman with the same handshake firmness as a man received higher ratings than the man.

**Source:** Stewart, G. L., S. L. Dustin, M. R. Barrick, and T. C. Darnold, 2008. Exploring the handshake in employment interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(5): 1139-1146.

## The Moral of the Story

Some people are scrupulous about telling the truth when they negotiate; others bluff shamelessly.

A recent article by Scott Reynolds suggests that this difference may reveal deep differences in moral attitudes. Some people are constantly aware of moral choices in their lives, while others are seemingly oblivious to them. Reynolds draws on social cognitive theory to develop a construct of moral attentiveness.

His study found that moral attentiveness comprises two dimensions: *perceptual* moral attentiveness and *reflective* moral attentiveness. The first involves the extent that an individual recognizes moral aspects of everyday life; the second involves the extent to which an individual regularly considers moral matters in behavioral choices. A reflective moral attentiveness leads individuals to make decisions guided by moral precepts. This study builds upon the current knowledge that the attention an individual pays to moral concepts is an important driver of moral behavior.

This research has possible practical implications in the training of managers and nonmanagerial employees. Given the recent wave of high-profile business scandals, sensitizing employees to moral dimensions would seem to be a valuable component of an organization's training program.

**Source:** Reynolds, S. J. 2008. Moral attentiveness: Who pays attention to the moral aspects of life? *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(5): 1027-1041.

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## Seeking Advice? Keep Your Emotions in Check

Persuading others why they should accept your proposal is a key component of negotiation. In a recent study, Francesca Gino and Maurice Schweitzer analyzed how people's emotional states affect both their receptivity and their judgment. Those feelings are in turn partly determined by whether they are blessed by good fortune or not.

Prior research on advice taking has focused on the reasons why people take or do not take advice, but it has failed to take into account the role emotions play in the process. Gino and Schweitzer's research examined the influence of *incidental* emotions — emotions triggered by a prior, unrelated experience — on advice taking. They tested three hypotheses, looking at how receptive individuals are to advice if they are experiencing incidental anger, incidental gratitude, and trust in their advisor.

They found that participants who experienced incidental gratitude were more trusting and receptive to advice and those who experienced incidental anger were less trusting and less receptive than those in a neutral emotional state. People who are seeking advice (or negotiating) should be mindful of their emotions before consulting others: a negative state of mind may lead you in the wrong direction.

**Source:** Gino, F and M. Schweitzer. 2008. Blinded by anger or feeling the love: How emotions influence advice taking. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(5): 1165-1173.