

THE EMOTIONS OF A Social Engineering Attack

Why do people fall for social engineering attacks? Emotions. Cyber attackers work hard to exploit natural emotions such as fear, curiosity, helpfulness, greed, urgency, and more. They hope their target acts upon their feelings rather than think critically about a situation.

Don't let your emotions get the best of you; become cyber-aware instead. Familiarize yourself with the tactics cyber attackers use to stay ahead of a social engineering attack.



Fear

An unpleasant and often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger

Fear is one of the most common emotions manipulated, as it can quickly trigger a panic response to get out of a stressful situation.



Account locked out
Due to excessive login attempts

EXAMPLES:

- The email evokes fear of forgetting or missing something.
- The email evokes fear that you've done something wrong or will lose your job.



Curiosity

An interest that leads to an inquiry

Threat actors often use curiosity to bait victims into seeking additional information or taking action.



Inbox 1h ago

I can't believe you would do this!
How are we going to explain these photos?

EXAMPLES:

- There's an ask to confirm details located in an attachment.
- There are claims that a payment has been sent.



Helpfulness

The desire to be of service or assistance

Threat actors often target new employees for their high potential for helpfulness and desire to excel in their new job. Many people are taught to obey superiors or authority, so few challenge the validity of requests.



David Manager 1h ago

Are you available for a few minutes?
I could really use your help.

EXAMPLES:

- Your boss is asking for a favor.
- The email includes a way to support help efforts of a tragedy, such as an earthquake or hurricane relief fund.



Greed

The intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth or power

Social engineering campaigns that exploit greed may offer a reward, financial gain, or power.



Inbox 1h ago

Investment opportunity
I received your info from a trusted friend...

EXAMPLES:

- A Nigerian Prince offers an investment opportunity or a fortune they can't get out of the country without your help.
- An email sent to you includes an attachment with company payroll details.



Irritation

The state of feeling annoyed, impatient, or slightly angry

Frustrations or distractions can make everyday tasks feel more annoying, leading to errant clicks or completing tasks without verification.



Inbox 1h ago

Payment processed for order
\$795 has been debited from your account

EXAMPLES:

- You receive frequent requests to approve sign-ins or update software, also known as prompt bombing.
- Repeated spam emails with the intent that, eventually, absurd amounts of contact will be compelling enough for the victim will click on the link.



Urgency

Importance requiring swift action.

Social engineering attacks almost always include a component of urgency. The goal is to get the victim to act before they think.



John CEO 1h ago

Mtng with investors NOW!! Can you email me our employee data sheet ASAP???

EXAMPLES:

- There's an account lockout that needs your prompt attention.
- You receive an urgent request from your boss, who you can't reach at that time.



Excitement

An emotional state marked by enthusiasm, eagerness, or anticipation

Phishing attempts will often use attractive incentives as lures.



Your Walmart receipt was chosen
2nd in our drawing for AirPods!

EXAMPLES:

- Claims that your FedEx package is on its way that prompts you to click for tracking information.
- You receive a suspicious gift that you can access via email.



Learn more about social engineering on our website.