

HOW EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE by Maureen Fitzgerald

Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy. Aristotle

A few years ago I was asked to develop a definition of the competent lawyer. A regulatory body of lawyers needed this description to develop a new entrance examination and revise their training for lawyers. My final meeting with the stakeholders sent me unknowingly in a completely unplanned direction. I told the group about the specific knowledge and skills that every lawyer should possess to practice law competently. I then explained that the weakness of the description was in the area of so-called attitudes or personal characteristics. As I was speaking, an insight came to me, that something fundamental is missing. I asked, "What if we included **the competency of loving**?" Everyone burst out laughing. For weeks afterwards I was teased. People laughingly asked me, "Maureen, how is the loving going?" That meeting foreshadowed my study of emotional intelligence.

Is it just a fad?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is often perceived as a fad. To others, it provides a missing piece to understanding the human workplace. EI helps enable workplaces to become more sensitive to the needs of people. This translates into a more committed and motivated workplace. It validates the expression of emotions.

Although much of the literature on this subject may seem obvious to those interested in human performance, emotions are still not fully understood and often denied in workplaces. The study of EI supports the work of human resource professionals and provides them with new mechanisms to support soft skills

The message that surfaces above all the debate is that if employees are permitted to be authentic they may become the best they can be, as individuals, employees, family members, participants in the community and the in the world. As explained by **Ann Coombs** in her book, *The Living Workplace*, "If corporations truly want their employees to be entrepreneurial – to be passionate, creative, innovative and excited about their work – they must meet the challenge of encouraging employees to express their passion.... leaders must recognize the need to look at their workers as individuals with hearts, talents and ideas and must find ways to encourage workers to bring their personal passions to bear on their work."

We all know the value of those employees who give with their hearts. We also know what happens to employees who have been heartbroken on the job. So why are some companies slow to recognize the significance of emotions at work – both positive and negative?

Recent research from the University of Missouri-Columbia shows that many employees do not want their co-workers to show their emotions – positive or negative. The research found that most employees surveyed felt that the only "appropriate way to manage negative emotions was to hide or mask them, and positive emotions should be

expressed in moderation". Many senior executives and managers are loath to discuss soft skills. The underlying assumptions are that emotions *can* be left at home and that emotions are damaging to the work environment.

The study of emotional intelligence challenges these assumptions. EI research shows that by hiding emotions, employees distort communication and, ironically, end up in deeper conflict. It also uncovers many things that we may already intuitively know.

So what is emotional intelligence?

Prominent EI author Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as “ *the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships. It describes abilities distinct from but complementary to academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ*”.

Emotional competence is not crying openly in the workplace. It is not talking about your personal life to the detriment of your job. It is not permitting managers to lash out at employees. It is not “letting it all hang out”. EI is simply the intelligent use of emotions. This means using your emotional capacity in combination with your intellectual, spiritual, physiological and other capacities.

The first model of EI was developed in 1980 by **Reuven Bar-On**, an Israeli psychologist. He tried to answer the question: Are there factors that determine one's ability to be successful in life? He spent 17 years gathering data on this question and developed a measurement tool called the EQ-I (the Emotional Quotient Inventory) which is sold through Multi-Health Systems (MHS) in Toronto (www.mhs.com).

However, it was **Daniel Goleman** that popularized EI in with his two books: Emotional Intelligence (1996) and Working with EI (1998). His book was based on research conducted by Peter Salovey and John Mayer who concluded in a 1995 research paper that emotional intelligence meets the traditional standards for being a separate form of “intelligence”. Goleman and his team also developed tools to measure EI. The Boston-based Hay Group markets these tools (www.haygroup.com). There are also several other assessment tools and training products available. A useful resource for information is the EI consortium at www.eiconsortium.com.

David Cory, of Cory Consulting in Vancouver is an expert on leadership development and provides training on the EQ-I assessment tool. He believes that emotional competencies provide the foundation for many leadership skills. He says EI training results in the development of deeper interpersonal skills that impact all sorts of work relations.

The research done in the last few years is vast. Recent themes in the research relate to the validity of the tests of emotional intelligence and the extent to which emotional intelligence impacts performance and success. The key findings are that EI can be measured and learned. It also has a direct relation to success and performance.

Is it the same old stuff?

If you work in a large organisation you were probably hired for your emotional intelligence. If you are involved in recruiting you are acutely aware of the importance of these competencies in hiring – particularly for leadership positions. If you are a manager you have probably struggled with emotions in the workplace. If you are a trainer you probably see a thread of emotional intelligence in all of the training that you do and probably know that emotional intelligence is a qualification of any good facilitator.

Emotional intelligence is not a fad or a trend, nor is it new. **Stephen Stein**, the president of MHS in Toronto, the provider of one of popular assessment tools, wrote in his book **The EQ Edge**,

“It seems novel only because it was shuffled aside, sent into hibernation by the 20th century’s fixation on scientific data and rationalism at any cost”... “At long last, the so-called soft skills that do so much to determine our success were rescued from the fringe and seriously considered mainstream for educators, business people and the media”.

A 2000 article in **Harvard Business Review** titled, “How Do you Feel”? described how EI was entering workplaces across the United States. The EI movement was compared to the human potential movement of the 1970’s and early 1980’s,

“...the influence of the human-potential movement prompted a brief corporate romance with such experiential techniques as sensitivity training and encounter groups. But these approaches lacked the vigor to endure. Before long, business got back to business. A backlash set in, and the focus returned to no-nonsense training methods that were highly quantifiable, happily free of emotions, and demonstrably able to produce results that would show up on the bottom line.”

So how can I use this?

In 1991 American Express launched an EI program in response to a simple business problem. Almost 70% of their clients chose not to buy life insurance although their financial profiles indicated that they needed it. Upon investigation they found that the problem was emotions – both in clients and sales people. Emotions such as fear, suspicion and powerlessness surrounded the decision to buy life insurance. At the same time they found that successful salespeople were more aware of their own feelings and better able to manage those feelings.

Kate Cannon, who implemented the American Express program recently wrote a series of articles with Geetu Orme, an international expert on EI on how to implement an EI program in the workplace. They recommend a type of program planning model that is often used to create and evaluate in-house training. They are in essence:

Step 1. Conduct a needs assessment. Ask: How can EI support the business? Who needs it? Where can it have the biggest impact?

Step 2. Define the desired outcomes. Ask: What will be different? for clients? for employees? for teams?

Step 3. Select an intervention. Ask: Do we need assessment? materials? training? coaching? facilitation?

Step 4. Design the program. Ask: Do we have content and process experts? Do we have academically trained facilitators? Are the trainers EI and authentic? The authors urge particular care at this stage since the learning of EI is developmental and not remedial. They note that there is no single source of EI content and it is not realistic to expect behaviour change in a short time.

Step 5. Implement and evaluate. Ask: How can it be offered and to whom at what cost? What are the outcomes or results? Are they measurable?

Dr. Jennifer Newman of Newman & Grigg (Vancouver) provides EI training in Canada and the United States. They offer an internationally recognized off the shelf program as well as custom designed programs tailored to the particular needs of clients. Dr. Newman believes that most successful intervention is one that is aligned with the corporate culture and co-developed with human resources professionals.

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind when considering an EI intervention is that emotional competencies are not just skills. They are deeply held behaviours that have developed over time. Many are rooted in personal beliefs and assumptions. Therefore, much of the learning about these competencies takes a long time and lots of practice and feedback or reflection. Although a day workshop could raise awareness about EI and perhaps teach a few skills, training in this area should involve instruction, time for individual and group reflection, ongoing feedback and support. This usually means a 3-6 month program with individual coaching.

This is reflected in an 1999 article by Hay Group that states:

“Tactically focused programs – the typically short seminars and workshops that have become the standard fare of most training efforts – do little to advance an individual’s EI beyond increasing awareness and understanding. Instead, a much more purposeful developmental program is needed – one that can effectively transform the ingrained patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviour that constitute EI”.

The first step

At the core of EI is the empowerment of every individual to be the best they can be. In order to do this people must understand themselves, their abilities, their needs and interests. The absolute first step is to get on the path of developing the competencies of self-awareness and self-management. This means getting to know yourself. This includes identifying what is unique about you, recognizing your own emotions as well as your particular strengths and weaknesses. You can do this by reading books or by attending courses, but the best way to do this is by reflecting on your own mission and goals. Then speak to others who will challenge you, such as coaches, mentors or counselors. Simply begin the process of asking questions. THE END

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