



Emotional Notions

Emotional intelligence is becoming a part of many organization's core competencies for high performers.

By Michael Laff

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Every manager who abruptly halts a conversation to race off to the next meeting should be advised to brush up on emotional intelligence.

Adele Lynn, a Pennsylvania-based author and consultant, advises clients that if they feel rushed during a particular day they are more than likely to sound rushed in their communications with staff. When an employee stops by to chat only to be dismissed by the manager, it lends the impression that the staff member is not valued.

“Emotional intelligence (EQ) teaches you to look inside before you open your mouth to communicate,” she says.

A decade ago any talk of emotional intelligence would draw strange looks. Now many organizations include it among core competencies required for high performers. As Joseph Liberti, a Colorado-based coach describes it, the concept has evolved from a Zen-like vocabulary term to a scientific field.

Authors Daniel Goleman and Cary Cherniss are credited with bringing the field from academia into the public arena.

Where emotions were once dismissed as raw and inappropriate in the office, they are now utilized as data by savvy leaders, according to Joshua Friedman, chief operating officer of Six Seconds Consulting in San Francisco. Learning to read the data and act upon it is what makes for an individual with high EQ.

“Leaders don’t care about emotional intelligence,” Friedman says. “They care about a business problem they have. Emotional intelligence is a tool they can use in the service of solving the problem.”

Instead of encouraging individuals to act differently, training in emotional intelligence teaches participants to observe and analyze their own behavior while also taking note of peer reactions.

“Most corporate training focuses on behavior such as shaking hands and making direct eye contact,” Friedman says. “Emotional intelligence teaches you to pay attention to what drives the behavior of others. Emotions are data. They are real. The training takes a logical approach to emotions.”

Some of the concepts that emotional intelligence teaches seem intuitive. Traits such as listening, being empathic, and keeping emotions under control are essential components of effective leadership. Yet a diligent student soon discovers that the flaw that a manager identifies in a colleague may actually be his own.

Organizations also acquired a greater understanding of leadership, specifically the traits necessary to be effective in the role. “The corporate world sees it as absolutely critical, but many probably don’t know how to develop it,” says Cherniss, a professor of applied psychology at Rutgers University.

In the early 1990s, long before other organizations were even aware of the term, American Express developed a five-day curriculum called emotional competency. Employees break into groups of 20 to do a number of experiential activities.

How Important Is EQ in Addressing the Primary Challenges of Your Organization?

Essential	75
Important	39
Somewhat important	10
Slightly important	0
Totally unimportant	4

Source: Six Seconds Consulting Group

The program is considered successful, according to Cherniss.

Some might dismiss emotional intelligence as a psychological analysis of one’s personality, but practitioners emphasize that the assessment tools measure aptitude.

“It’s different from Myers-Briggs, which just says everybody is different, but that’s okay,” says Ben Dattner, an organizational effectiveness consultant and professor at New York University. “The Myers-Briggs will tell you you’re an introvert, but that it can be a strength. Emotional intelligence can say that you lack some fundamental skills.”

Dattner says the typical flaws found in managers from emotional intelligence studies are lack of empathy, selfishness, and poor conflict management skills. It takes a courageous manager to work on emotional intelligence because she may hear comments she is unaccustomed to hearing.

Besides publications, practitioners now use more sophisticated means to collect information. When working with clients who manage people, consultants use 360-feedback and self-assessment exams to create a profile. Allowing consultants to interview subordinates is just one sign that emotional intelligence carries greater caché in the workplace.

“The idea of getting feedback today is more meaningful than threatening,” says John Myers a management consultant with Colorado-based Tracom Group. “When we first started it was seen as a danger to the individual.”

Upon receiving feedback many individuals are surprised by the gap between how they see themselves versus how peers view them. At first the individual attempts to categorize his behavior by making a distinction between an office personality and an actual personality.

The classic example of this split-office personality is the salesperson who is adored by customers but loathed by co-workers. The person has the skills to work cooperatively with everybody but chooses to employ them only with select individuals, Myers says.

Myers advises clients to take the feedback and discuss it with a spouse or a close friend. The typical reaction from the spouse is, “You paid money for this?”

“We don’t try to change who they are,” Myers says. “We want them to use their behavior traits more effectively.”

Michael Laff is senior associate editor for T+D; mlaff@astd.org.