

Nice Theory, But What Do I Do Now?

A business leader's guide to building Emotional Intelligence

by Sue Johnston

You've re-engineered your processes to reduce costs and eliminate defects. You've automated every activity you can squeeze onto a computer. Your inventory is just in time. You've outsourced activities unrelated to your core business. You've formed strategic alliances with your suppliers. You consider customers partners in success. You've done scenario building and strategic planning and know where your company is headed. Your accounting procedures are so squeaky clean they sparkle. You've diversified your investment portfolio, your work force, and even your board of directors. You're balancing your scorecard. You've strengthened every link in the value chain. You may even be "living your brand promise" – though you're not genuinely sure what that means.

In short, you've implemented most of the success formulas recommended in the business literature since you learned to read.

Then along comes emotional intelligence. "Interesting idea," you say, "but what do I *do* with it?"

In his 1995 bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Bantam), Daniel Goleman cites hard research on 'soft skills.' Brain research and behavioural studies suggest people who recognize, understand, and express feelings are more likely than others to thrive in the world. That includes the business world. Goleman calls this learned ability *emotional intelligence (EI)*.

What is emotional intelligence?

Whether you call it emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, or emotional quotient (EQ), the concept describes the learned ability to recognize, understand, and express feelings, your own and other people's. Research suggests that people who have high EQ are more likely to thrive in the world – including the business world.

EI redefines what it means to be smart. Evidence suggests IQ contributes only 20 per cent to life success. The rest comes from emotional intelligence. That helps explain why people who aren't intellectually gifted can use personal and social competence to become highly successful. It also explains how high-IQ people can sometimes be so clueless.

The success of Goleman's work inspired other authors and researchers working in the field to publish and popularize their research and views. "EQ may be more important than IQ," claim legions of psychologists, consultants, trainers, performance specialists, coaches, and writers. They're right – and they're helping leaders strike an intelligent balance of reason and emotion.

The combination of high EQ and high IQ can be a powerful business advantage. The great news is that, unlike IQ, you're not stuck with a fixed amount of EQ; you can work to improve it. Not only can you improve your *own* emotional intelligence, you can help develop it in others, and build an emotionally intelligent organization.

The emotional world is the new frontier for managers. Today's effective manager must be a skilled emotional navigator, perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

There are good reasons to do this. Studies suggest that high EI individuals are more likely than others to make more sales, perform well on the job, complete training programs, have better health, and adjust to new work situations. Their low EI counterparts are more likely to report debilitating stress, take time off work for depression, and suffer career derailment.

So how do I improve EI?

Improving EI takes awareness, practice, and reinforcement. You're building new habits, and that takes time.

Step One is recognizing that feelings matter and emotions come to work whether or not we want them to. People with high EI handle their own emotions well and respond appropriately to other people's emotions. This helps them get along with others, stay the course in difficult times, see the upside of their situations, and realize their potential.

On the other hand, there's the low EI crowd:

- o the "my way or the highway" boss,
- o the colleague who's consistently negative,
- o the maliciously compliant subordinate who grudgingly does what you ask -- and only that.

These people, unwittingly, create a downward spiral of antagonism, knotted stomachs, and ill will.

So which group are you in? Step Two is to determine your own EI level. Self-awareness is the foundation for emotional intelligence. There are more sophisticated tools; however, your answers to these questions give you an informal measure:

- o Are you aware of your feelings and their effect on your own and others' behaviour?
- o Do you usually know how other people feel, even if they don't tell you?
- o Are you sensitive to other people's needs?
- o Do you work well in stressful circumstances?
- o When you're angry, upset, or disappointed, can you make your needs known in a way that resolves the situation, rather than making it worse?
- o Can you stay focussed on long term goals?
- o Do you use 'gut feelings' to help you reach decisions?

Self-awareness is the first of four groups of leadership qualities Goleman identifies:

- o *Self-Awareness* includes reading your own emotions and recognizing their impact as well as knowing your strengths and limits.
- o *Self-Management* involves keeping disruptive impulses under control, integrity, flexibility, optimism, and a passion for excellence.
- o *Social Awareness* means sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking interest in their concerns.
- o *Relationship Management* involves motivating with a compelling vision, developing others, conflict management, and teamwork.

The chart at the end of this article summarizes the EI competencies Goleman identified.

You can build your emotional intelligence one attribute at a time. Start by noticing your feelings. Then choose one or two attributes and consciously work at improving them. Enlist someone to monitor or coach you.

This is critical if you're the boss. Feelings, especially yours, are contagious. I worked at a firm that developed a new product in response to an offhand remark by its famously grumpy CEO. When it went to him for approval, his reaction was, "Whose stupid idea was that?"

Monitoring and managing your feelings doesn't mean suppressing them. Express them, but not in that miserable executive's fashion. He put everyone into 'fight or flight' mode and impeded clear thinking. That CEO was a poster boy for emotional illiteracy, but who was going to tell him?

You need feedback. Seek it formally, with anonymous assessments by your colleagues and reports. This teases out information people won't tell you directly. Seek it informally, by getting out and talking with people. Ask them how you're doing, how they're doing, and what they need to make their work better. Draw them an inspiring vision of the future that makes their work meaningful. Blaming and shaming people will not work. Naming, claiming, and taming emotions will.

The Old School of command and control, epitomized by *Dagwood's* ranting cartoon boss, would scoff at the notion that *affective* qualities are critical for *effective* leadership.

But Mr. Dithers' leadership style can lead to the demoralized, disengaged, and disinterested workforce seen in another, more cynical cartoon.

Dilbert inhabits a work environment where leaders are devoid of emotional intelligence. Check your workplace. A high number of *Dilbert* cartoons posted in the cubicles may mean employee morale is low.

"Employee morale is low." The traditional language of business fails to even recognize emotion. Let's call a feeling a feeling. "Employees are unhappy."

They don't have to be. As they, and you, learn to navigate and manage the world of emotions in the workplace, this can change. And when you and your employees are happy, your customers, and shareholders will probably be happy, too.

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Emotional Intelligence Competencies

As identified by Daniel Goleman

PERSONAL COMPETENCE These capabilities determine how we manage ourselves.	
Self-Awareness	Self-Management
<p>EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS: Reading one’s own emotions and recognizing their impact; using ‘gut sense’ to guide decisions.</p> <p>ACCURATE SELF-ASSESSMENT: knowing one’s strengths and limits.</p> <p>SELF CONFIDENCE: A sound sense of one’s worth and capabilities.</p>	<p>EMOTIONAL SELF-CONTROL: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control.</p> <p>TRANSPARENCY: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness, conscientiousness.</p> <p>ADAPTABILITY: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles.</p> <p>ACHIEVEMENT: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence.</p> <p>INITIATIVE: Readiness to act and seize opportunities.</p> <p>OPTIMISM: Seeing the upside in events.</p>

SOCIAL COMPETENCE These capabilities determine how we manage relationships.	
Social Awareness	Relationship Management
<p>EMPATHY: Sensing others’ emotions, understanding their perspective and taking interest in their concerns.</p> <p>ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS: Reading the currents, decision networks, politics at the organizational level.</p> <p>SERVICE: Recognizing and meeting follower, client or customer needs.</p>	<p>INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision.</p> <p>INFLUENCE: Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion.</p> <p>DEVELOPING OTHERS: Bolstering others’ abilities through feedback and guidance.</p> <p>CHANGE CATALYST: Initiating, managing and leading in a new direction.</p> <p>CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: Resolving disagreements.</p> <p>TEAMWORK & COLLABORATION: Co-operation and team building.</p>