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FOR:

OUR COLLEAGUES AND BUSINESS PARTNERS

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“SO WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?”

After a recent class reunion, a good high school friend and I reviewed the poignant day we’d just experienced. We shared typical reunion observations. “I can’t believe Jim is running his own company now. He just squeaked through our senior year.” “What happened to Susan? She was our valedictorian and seemed so destined for success.” “And how did painfully shy Steve become the successful executive in a PR firm?”

Our conversation eventually drifted away from classmate reviews to the more substantive topic of emotional intelligence, leadership, and success. How are they related? Does IQ or EQ matter the most? Finally, Bob asked me, “So what exactly is emotional intelligence any way?” That is a question that reaches well beyond high school reunions, especially for those who find themselves in any kind of leadership—CEO, V.P. of Sales, or Project Manager.

What is emotional intelligence and how can it improve your leadership?

To answer this question let’s turn to Daniel Goleman, the founder of emotional intelligence. In a Harvard Business Review article in 2000 entitled “Leadership That Gets Results,” Goleman offered a working definition of emotional intelligence that is relevant, and challenges leaders at every level in an organization. What follows is a summary of Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence Primer.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage our relationships and ourselves effectively. It consists of four capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and social skill. Each capability is composed of a set of competencies.

Self-Awareness

- Emotional self-awareness: The ability to recognize your emotions and the impact they have on work performance and professional relationships.
- Accurate self-assessment: A realistic appraisal of your strengths and limitations.
- Self-confidence: A strong and positive sense of self-worth.

Self-Management

- Self-control: The ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses under control.

- Trustworthiness: A consistent display of honesty and integrity.
- Conscientiousness: The ability to manage yourself and your responsibilities.
- Adaptability: The skill of adjusting to change and overcoming obstacles.
- Achievement oriented: The drive to meet internal standards of excellence.
- Initiative: A readiness to seize opportunities.

Social Awareness

- Empathy: Skill at sensing other's emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking interest in their concerns.
- Organizational awareness: The ability to see the trends in business culture and navigate politics.
- Service orientation: The ability to recognize and respond to customer's needs.

Social Skill

- Visionary leadership: The ability to take charge and inspire with a compelling vision.
- Influence: The ability to utilize a wide range of persuasive styles.
- Developing others: The capacity to encourage the abilities of others through feedback and guidance.
- Communication: Skilled at listening and sending clear, convincing, well-tuned messages.
- Change catalyst: Proficiency in initiating new ideas and leading people in new directions.
- Conflict management: The ability to de-escalate disagreements and orchestrate resolutions.
- Building bonds: Capable of cultivating and maintaining a web of effective relationships.
- Teamwork and collaboration: Competent in promoting cooperation and building work groups.

Improving Your Leadership EQ

Granted, this is a daunting list of abilities. However, the encouraging thing about emotional intelligence is that you can improve it. Emotional intelligence is made up of immediate, tactical behaviors that are brought into a personal or professional situation when needed. Unlike IQ, which is largely determined and set by our genetic pool, EQ can be increased with self-observation, intentional goal setting, and coaching.

Here is an example of observing yourself, and choosing a simple skill on which to improve:

1. Read through the list of abilities again and pick one that is a current challenge for you.
2. Let's say you struggle with "*Empathy: Skill at sensing other's emotion, understanding their perspective, and taking interest in their concern.*"
3. Identify a person on your team or in your organization with whom it is difficult to empathize or whose perspective often irritates you.
4. Initiate a one-on-one conversation with them that starts with, "I would like to better understand your thinking and perspective on..." You can add your own versions of, "Tell me what you were feeling in the difficult leadership meeting yesterday." And, "Do you feel I now understand your vantage point on this issue?"
5. You get the point. Improving EQ is about moving **toward** our challenges and creating venues that require us to step just beyond our current comfort zone in each of our less developed competencies.

Putting EQ in Perspective

Emotional intelligence brings an unconventional wisdom to leadership skills at every level in an enterprise. Remember in The Little Prince, the author says it is with the heart that one sees rightly and that what is essential is invisible to the eye. EQ gives you that "sixth sense" as a leader, a skill that is becoming increasingly important in the complex and sometimes turbulent nature of the marketplace. It helps connect the dots when facing tough strategic, financial, and personnel challenges common to all leaders.

We believe that organizational leaders, who integrate EQ with strong character, and the courage and capacity to lead, can build high-performance environments. And these are creative, fun places to work. Remember that you can increase your EQ will intentional, focused effort. So apply these working definitions of emotional intelligence to your current leadership challenges and expect more fulfillment, both at work and at home.