

Why Is “Emotional Intelligence” Such a Big Deal?

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Emotions drive the decisions of many people. Despite the stereotype, humans are not predominantly logical. Sure, some people make decisions heavily based on cause-and-effect. But most of us allow how we feel to heavily influence our choices. Surely that’s true for most of the people under your authority. Just listen to how often they use “feel” words rather than “think” words.

Emotions drive YOUR decisions. I’m sorry to bust your belief that you are mostly a rational thinker. I held onto that self-image for a long time! Now that I’ve finally acknowledged what I’m writing in this article, I see myself (and leaders I influence) heavily influenced by their feelings and opinions. For example, I know now that I don’t think as clearly when I am feeling sad, discouraged, or irritable.

Research is showing that the most effective leaders have a high EQ. The term “IQ” (Intelligence Quotient) and an associated test was developed in the early 1900’s. IQ originally was the ratio of intellectual age divided by chronologic age. EQ is not, however, a ratio (emotional age divided by chronologic age). It’s a term based simply on the generally accepted comfort with the IQ concept.

Emotional intelligence can be measured. Though there is no universally accepted definition of EQ, several assessment tools have been generated and are commercially available. Examples are the SEIP (Social and Emotional Intelligence Profile), the Bar-On EQ-i (Reuven Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory), the MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test), the ECI (Emotional Competence Inventory), the ESCI (Emotional and Social Competence Inventory), and the PEC (Profile of Emotional Competence). Information about each is available on the internet. Each has been uniquely developed and researched. I use the SEIP in my work with clients.

Emotional intelligence can be improved. WOW! Basic intelligence (that which is represented by your IQ) is unlikely to change in your lifetime. Emotional intelligence, however, can be significantly enhanced with greater awareness and a strong desire to more effectively apply your new insights. Through increased learning, you can raise your EQ and your ability to favorably influence others.

Simply reading about the topic of emotional intelligence, however, will enhance your emotional competence very little. As in every other aspect of leadership, it’s what you DO that affects your organization’s culture, processes, and results—not what you KNOW! Conscious attention, hopefully with supportive allies to provide feedback and encouragement, will give you the greatest gains.

Articles about emotional intelligence have appeared everywhere. Since the 1995 publication of Daniel Goleman’s *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, much has been written about the power of emotional intelligence to enhance leader effectiveness. Articles have appeared in the Harvard Business Review, Psychology Today, Forbes, Business Week, the Wall Street Journal, Time, Fast Company, Inc., and many other publications.

Emotions are contagious. If you want to have a healthy culture, you as the leader will have to set the tone. We all know that people reflect back to us that which we “put out there.” If you are angry and nasty, people don’t respond well. If you are courteous and respectful, people respond in kind.

The quality of an organization’s culture and processes ultimately affects the delivery of results. For far too long, what is recognized today as emotional intelligence was discounted as “soft skills.” The term was often used disparagingly, seemingly to reinforce the stature of the speaker as “all business” and a results oriented leader.

We now know that emotional intelligence will set you apart when you are surrounded by the smartest of people. I encourage you to learn about the concept and become more overt in practicing the skills.

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