

Presidential Emotional Intelligence

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Please join me on Sunday, October 9, in watching the second Presidential debate. I invite you, as an organizational leader, to observe and learn from the emotional intelligence skills of both candidates.

Each nominee wants to attract supporters from the many voters who are undecided. As you watch, consider how effectively Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump apply the four major categories of emotional intelligence (outlined below) in making connections to the American people.

I invite you to watch not only to help you decide how to vote. I encourage you to learn from these role models what you could be doing (and should avoid doing) in your own areas of responsibility.

Is the future President of our nation deeply engaging the American public in supporting his or her candidacy? As you watch, think about how your behaviors at work either resonate with or irritate those individuals in your organization who are needed for its long-term success. Use this debate as an opportunity to enhance your awareness and skill in this still not-well-understood, yet critically important, aspect of organizational leadership.

Emotional intelligence is composed of four categories of awareness and skill. Two skills deal with “self” (self-awareness and self-management). Two skills deal with others (social awareness and relationship management). Following is a brief description of each competence, along with some suggestions for observing the comments and behaviors of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

Self awareness is the ability in the moment to accurately sense your own emotions and recognize your tendencies in a variety of situations. To hone this skill, you think through what triggers your emotions and observe how you typically respond to situations. Improving your awareness requires you to work through the discomfort of exploring negative feelings you sometimes experience.

Like the candidates in this debate, you are often in high-profile situations. You are repeatedly being tested, judged, and maybe even criticized. Are you deeply sensitive to what’s happening to your physiology and mental outlook as you engage with your colleagues, customers, and hierarchy?

Some authorities suggest that the single most critical success factor for a leader is self-awareness. Since “awareness” occurs inside your head, your colleagues can only make inferences by observing your facial expressions and body language. What can you imagine is occurring in the minds of our Presidential candidates as questions and challenges are quickly hurled at each of them?

Self management refers to the actions you take (or don’t take) in response to your emotions. If you are strong in this skill, you are able to remain flexible over a wide variety of situations, directing your behaviors toward a positive interaction.

Both candidates in the first debate professed a desire to remain “Presidential” in their presentation. Do you think they succeeded? Watch how well they manage their defensiveness, pride, and anger in this debate. How well do you cope with these and other emotions as they are triggered in you?

You have choices every time you face a demanding situation. Are trusted allies giving you honest feedback about how you come across to your constituents? If you don’t already have a cadre of people who are reporting to you what they witness personally and hear from your team members, consider developing a team of trusted individuals who will deliver truthful observations to you.

Social awareness is the ability to discern the emotions of other people, understanding how they are feeling independent of your own perspectives. This is typically not easy to do because each of us is distracted and biased by our own emotional reaction to what is happening.

When you take action at work, are you sensitive to how your team members respond? Sometimes our Presidential candidates seem to quickly and blindly proceed with whatever they believe in the moment is the politically right thing to say! Look at how frequently each quotes the opposing candidate's embarrassing, incriminating comments made at a different time to a different audience.

You always have a choice in what you say and do. In most instances, you can slow down the action to give yourself time to think of both the beneficial and detrimental impact your words and actions might have on the large number of people who look to you for guidance.

Relationship management is the ability to interact with others effectively, using awareness of your own feelings and those of other people. People who manage interactions well recognize the value of healthy relationships and are willing to forego instinctive reactions in favor of behaviors that will lead to greater interpersonal effectiveness over time.

Connecting with the American public is allegedly the primary objective of each candidate. However, both seem so self-focused that they sometimes appear not to consider or even care about the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of the individuals watching the debate.

Why are the Presidential candidates seemingly lacking in emotional intelligence? Perhaps they don't value it. Perhaps they value instead the image of knowledge and power they've established in the functional and technical skills they've acquired. Describing their achievements (and attacking what the other candidate has said and done) seems to be the marketing strategy each has adopted.

The obvious desire of each candidate is to convince and align voters. Does that seem to you to be their highest priority? Admittedly, it's hard to connect over the airways to the millions of unseen individual Americans. You, as a leader in your organization, however, don't have that handicap.

You are not appealing to a vague somebody "out there." To the contrary, you are probably able to communicate personally with each individual in your organization, though perhaps not in person, in the most effective face-to-face way. By e-mail or phone, however, you have the ability to ask questions and offer thoughts one-on-one, and your team members can do the same.

Do you know less about emotional intelligence than you'd like to know? Consider a growth objective to learn, so that you can more effectively share your strengths with your organization.

Obtain an internal or external coach to help you acquire the insights and to experiment with developing the skills. Surely you want to engage with those under your authority far more effectively than Mr. Trump and Ms. Clinton seem to be doing with the American people!

Dennis Hooper is an Executive Coach, helping Atlanta organizations improve processes, enhance cultures, and build future leaders. Contact Dennis at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com or at 404-575-3050. His leadership articles are available at buildingfutureleaders.com/article-archives.html.