

*n*SIGHTS

Person(nel) Development Resources

Managing with Emotional Intelligence: Developing Empathy

The business community has embraced the concept of emotional intelligence and its importance ever since Daniel Goleman's best-selling book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998) was published. But the challenge that lies ahead is to demonstrate that such competencies can be acquired and when they are, that they significantly impact employee performance.

New studies in corporations that have adopted emotional intelligence training have shown that "EI" can be learned and it is effective. When programs are implemented there are overall improvements in productivity and profits. The back page of this newsletter lists of few of these studies.

Up to 90% of the difference between outstanding and average leaders is linked to emotional intelligence. "EI" is twice as important as IQ and technical expertise combined, and is four times as important in terms of overall success.

Research continues to mount evidence of the effectiveness of EI training programs, yet many leaders in the business world await further quantitative analysis. Before addressing emotional competencies, they want further proof. There is reluctance to address anything "emotional" when it comes to business, even when the word "intelligence" is tacked on behind it.

Emotional intelligence, or "EI," is the ability to recognize your own feelings and those of others, and the ability to motivate yourself and others, as well as to manage

your own emotions and those of others. Essentially, there are four competencies:

1. Understanding yourself, or *self-awareness*
2. Managing yourself, or *self-management*
3. Understanding others, or *social awareness*

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4. Managing others, or *social skills*

Perhaps it would be better to simplify the concept. Emotional intelligence increases when people commit themselves to building practical competencies in the context of every day situations. Nothing can be more powerful than developing empathy skills during everyday interactions on the job.

One of the foundation skills for EI is the skill of empathy. It starts with self-awareness, in that understanding your own emotions is essential to understanding the feelings of others. It is crucial to effective communication and to leading others. Lack of empathy is a primary cause of interpersonal difficulties leading to poor performance, executive derailment, and problems with customer relationships.

Empathy as a competency skill is poorly understood by those who need it most. Most people believe you either have it or you don't. Many hard-driving managers lack a propensity for developing empathy because they assume it's "touchy-feely." Some very intelligent leaders are walking around blindly using only their powers of reasoning and wondering why everyone can't see things their way.

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competence, and in particular, these three primary ones:

1. Difficulty in handling change.
2. Not being able to work well as a team.
3. Poor interpersonal relations.

Without an adequate understanding of the other's point of view, managers lack sufficient flexibility for change, cannot work well with team collaboration, and cannot relate well with the very people who should be giving them results.

Empathy can be defined as the ability to see things from the other person's point of view. Daniel Goleman, in *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, defines it as the ability to read other people. Other definitions include the concept of identifying with the other person or their situation. This implies more than a cognitive understanding. Empathy means that you can recall some of those same feelings based on your own experiences. There is a sharing and identifying with emotional states.

What does this have to do with running a business, managing a company and dealing with bottom-line performance issues? Obviously, if managers were to take the time to listen with empathy at everything that was said, nothing would get done. One cannot fall prey to being swept up into every person's story. Managers and leaders must keep the focus and guide people to goal completion.



According to Goleman, empathy represents the foundation skill for all the social competencies important for work:

1. **Understanding others:** the ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives
2. **Service orientation:** the ability to anticipate, recognize and meet customers' needs
3. **Developing others:** the ability to sense others developmental needs and to bolster their abilities
4. **Leveraging diversity:** the ability to cultivate opportunities through diverse people
5. **Political awareness:** the ability to read the political and social currents in an organization

Managers and leaders are usually high in those traits and characteristics that lead to successful goal completion, such as high achievement orientation and high focusing abilities. That's why they get promoted to managing positions. Success depends a great deal on having focus, being able to persevere, and being able to concentrate. But focus alone can result in undesirable consequences if not counterbalanced by empathy. Focus alone will not result in the fulfillment of goals. Focus and empathy will.

Empathy skills are those that involve paying attention to people—things like listening, attending to needs and wants of others, and building relationships. When empathy skills are high, one is more likely to inspire the troops. People are more likely to go the extra mile.



Both managers and employees need empathy in order to interact well with customers, suppliers, the general public and with each other. Managers need it even more when they are assigning a task to someone who won't like it; when offering criticism to someone who predictably will get defensive; when having to deal with someone we don't like; when dealing with employee disputes; and when giving bad news such as telling someone that they won't be promoted or that they're being laid off. The first step in dealing with any negativity is to empathize. The next step is to focus back to the goals and the tasks at hand.

Empathy involves real curiosity and a desire to know or understand people. There is a genuine interest in what the person is saying and feeling. You cannot have empathy without asking questions. Some typical ones are:

1. "Can you say more about that?"
2. "Really? That's interesting. Can you be more specific?"
3. "I wasn't aware of that. Tell me more."
4. "I'm curious about that...let's discuss this in more depth."
5. "Let me see if I understand you correctly...here is what I hear you say..."
6. "How do you feel about that? What are some of your concerns?"

How, then, do you learn effective empathy if you are one of those task-oriented managers who is primarily focused on achievement? The good news is that your achievement orientation and focusing abilities will help you in acquiring empathy skills. The bad news is that it may not seem natural at first. Fortunately, empathy is a learned capability and like other competencies, it can be acquired. The most effective way to develop empathy, or any of the emotional competencies, is by working one-on-one with a coach.

Here are some steps to take to begin improving empathy as an effective management tool.

Like all the emotional competencies, it is better to practice with an experienced coach who can monitor and give effective feedback. Reading a book and taking a class can both help to gain a greater cognitive understanding of what is involved. However, empathy skills must be learned experientially, that is, practiced in the field in real-time.



1. Keep a log of situations in which you felt you were able to demonstrate empathy and in which you felt you did not.

2. Become aware of incidents where underlying concerns were not explicitly expressed.
3. Make a note of possible emotions or feelings that the other person may be experiencing.
4. Develop a list of questions to ask at your next encounter with that person. Try to make the questions open-ended, that is questions that can't be answered by yes or no.
5. Practice listening without interrupting. Wait until the other person is complete with their point of view before offering yours.
6. Avoid being defensive.
7. Allow time for people to express opinions and ideas.
8. Practice active listening: check out the meaning of what was said by paraphrasing.
9. Always bring focus back into the conversation. Effective managing involves a combination of empathy and focus, of relationship awareness and task orientation.

Resources for Emotional Intelligence

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Assessing for Emotional Intelligence

BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory, Multi-Health Systems, www.mhs.com.

Emotional Competency Inventory, The Hay Group, www.EISGlobal.com.

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