

SOURCE LINES

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: The Personal Competencies & Success

Author's Note: This article is the second in a series of 4 that review the recent work of Daniel Goleman, PhD. about Emotional Intelligence: What it is? & Why it is a critical ingredient in every part of every business. We appreciate any thoughts and comments readers have about this series. Please contact us at our e-mail address reachus@sourceline.net and visit our newly launched Web Site at www.sourceline.net.

From Technological Utopia to Emotional Intelligence – The History

Until very recently most of us had never heard of Fredrick Taylor and his notions of 'scientific management.' Increasingly, however, there are those who think that Taylor's work has as great a day-to-day effect on all of us as the scientists, philosophers, artists and politicians we usually identify with shaping our modern world.

In 1895 Taylor's principles of "scientific management" were published. One of his central preoccupations was analyzing workplace tasks to discover the most efficient way to carry them out. Through his work Taylor popularized the **technological utopians** idea of 'efficiency' that "...came to mean the maximum yield that could be produced in the shortest time, expending the least amount of energy, labor, and capital in the process." The utopians believed efficiency "would lead to a workerless future of vast material abundance and unlimited free time."¹ Now, 100 years later efficiency remains a preoccupation in so far as it translates into increased shareholder value and improved competitiveness in a global marketplace.

At about the same time that engineers like Taylor and his followers were trying to create machines and ways of doing things using scientific principles, psychologists were beginning to look for ways to "measure" people with IQ tests to measure efficiency in learning and personality tests to measure what 'type' of person someone was. However, both kinds of psychological measures turned out to be of limited utility as both were poor predictors of who would and would not be successes in the real world of work.

Enter Professor David McClelland of Harvard University. In the 1970's McClelland directed research to explore the ingredients of superb job performance and in 1973 published "Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence". In this paper "he proposed that a set of specific competencies including empathy, self-discipline, and initiative distinguished the most successful from those who were merely good enough to keep their jobs."² McClelland was Daniel Goleman's academic advisor for his doctoral work and the student was drawn into what he saw as a "revolution in thinking about the roots of excellence." The search for efficiency marches on.

"It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Antoine De Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*

Goleman's two most recent books are a report on the state of the art of understanding the place emotions play in our lives, within ourselves, and with others. In his view, all the evidence points to **seeing emotions as an essential and nec-**

essary ingredient to all human thought and behaviour. In the complex working environments of today it is increasingly important for individuals to respond to situations and one another with flexibility, creativity and adaptability rather than reflexively biting, spitting, approaching, fleeing or chasing like primitive beings deciding if it was edible or toxic, sexually available, enemy or meal.

Goleman gives a catalogue of evidence to demonstrate how hollow and limited rational thought can be in the absence of the “wisdom” of emotional memory. Moreover, the costs of emotional illiteracy are real and measurable. Impatience, insensitivity and carelessness in our relations with one another translate immediately into upset and distraction that is contagious. “Stress makes people stupid...When emotionally upset, people cannot remember, attend, learn, or make decisions clearly. For example, in 80 percent of airline crashes, pilots make mistakes that could have been prevented, particularly if the crew worked together more harmoniously. Teamwork, open lines of communication, cooperation, listening, and speaking one’s mind—rudiments of social intelligence—are now emphasized in training pilots, along with technical prowess.”³

While “interpersonal ineptitude in leaders lowers everyone’s performance...wastes time, creates acrimony, corrodes motivation and commitment, builds hostility and apathy”, emotional competencies such as optimism, adaptability and self-control are value added to business. Whether it is selling shampoo or directing the development of the space-station, the star performers are distinguished, not by IQ or expertise but by knowledge and skills in managing themselves and others.

The Emotional Intelligence / Emotional Competence Connection

Goleman’s explanation of **personal or emotional intelligence** borrows from the work of two psychologists, Howard Gardner and Peter Salovey. Emotional intelligence is made up of five elements that are the building blocks of emotional competence. The five elements include: **self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and adeptness in relationships.** Emotional intelligence and emotional competence are related to one another but

are not the same thing. Goleman writes, “An emotional *competence* is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work...For instance, being good at serving customers is an emotional competence based on empathy. Likewise, trustworthiness is a competence based on self-regulation, or handling impulses and emotions well. Both customer service and trustworthiness are competencies that can make people outstanding in their work...but...Simply being high in emotional intelligence does not guarantee a person will have learned the emotional competencies that matter for work: it means only that they have excellent potential to learn them.”²

The first three elements of emotional intelligence make up our inner-self and include:

Self-awareness: Goleman describes self-awareness as an “**inner rudder**” that provides us with the ability to recognize our feelings and moods as they happen and understand their effects on ourselves and others. Self-awareness is a first step to controlling our feelings rather than being slaves to them. It means being aware of our values and goals. Without that awareness we drift: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” Chronic drifting is bad for our health, emotional and physical. People with this personal competence of emotional awareness:

- **Know which emotions they are feeling and why**
- **Realize the links between their feelings and what they think, do, and say**
- **Recognize how their feelings affect their performance**
- **Have a guiding awareness of their values and goals**

The bottom-line is simple. When our actions fit with our values and goals we are energized. When there is discrepancy between our values and our actions we become disturbed by doubts and second thoughts and our ability to work suffers. Whether we are an operator in production or the chief operations officer, our ability to contribute is diminished.

Self-regulation: The ability to master our feelings and emotions rather than being slaves to them is in no way a new thing. The Greek philosopher Plato spoke of “care and intelligence in conducting one’s life; a tempered balance and wisdom.”³ “The goal is balance, not emotional suppression: every feeling has its value and significance.” There are even times when getting ourselves into an unpleasant mood can be useful: doctors get somber to deliver bad news to a patient; bill collectors put on an angry face to deal with a person in chronic arrears; or a manager trying to “steel” her feelings as part of getting ready to inform an employee of termination. Emotional competence in this area “implies we have a choice as to how we express our feelings.”²

In addition to being able to manage our hearts Goleman points out that in a global economy many of us must know the “ground rules for emotional expression” which can vary greatly from one culture to another. For example, behaviour that is seen as enthusiasm in one country may be seen as an overbearing display in another.

At the core people with this emotional competence are skilled at handling impulse and dealing with upsets. They demonstrate:

- **Self-control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses effectively**
- **Trustworthiness: Displaying honesty and integrity**
- **Conscientiousness: Dependability and responsibility in fulfilling obligations**
- **Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change and challenges**
- **Innovation: Being open to novel ideas, approaches, and new information**

Adaptability and innovation are frequently held up as necessary attitudes to have in a world on constant and rapid change. Unfortunately, some in leadership positions who find excitement in change and innovation have not taken the time to appreciate or assist those who experience fear, anxiety and personal discomfort with the demands of continual change. Too often the expression “hand holding” is used to describe an activity to be avoided at all costs.

Experience shows however that encouraging and assisting a person to adjust to change through patient and supportive training (investment of time) is an enormously important emotional competence that increases motivation, loyalty and goodwill in a workplace.

One final word about innovation. Goleman describes innovation as the product of new, “fragile” ideas that can easily fall victim to the four “creativity killers”: constant scrutiny, over-evaluation, micromanaging, and relentless deadlines. A fifth has to do with the “origin” of the idea. We need to ask ourselves, Do good ideas come from the “bottom - up” in my company or is it always “top - down?” Cutting edge creativity requires a work setting where the reward for moving forward comes from all parts of the organization and all parts of the organization receive credit and reward for bringing forward “bright ideas.” In other words, sometimes the best R&D ideas are born on the production floor. It is a skill to be open to the potentially creative ideas of others. Companies flourish when bright ideas make it to implementation. Creativity killers destroy initiative in all workplaces.

Motivation: “There is a saying in India, ‘When a pickpocket meets a saint, all he sees are the pockets.’ Our motives shape how we see the world; all attention is selective, and what matters to us most is what we automatically scan for.”² People who are motivated to do their jobs well demonstrate three competencies:

- **Achievement drive: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.**
- **Commitment: Embracing the organization’s or group’s vision and goals.**
- **Initiative and optimism: Twin competencies that mobilize people to seize opportunities and allow them to take setbacks and obstacles in stride.**

People with achievement drive are results-oriented, take calculated risks, seek information to reduce uncertainty and continually

learn to improve their performance. Commitment shows itself in the ability to make sacrifices to meet organizational goals; use the values of the organization to guide making decisions; and looking for opportunities to move the group's mission forward. Lastly, people with initiative and optimism go beyond the minimum expected; persist in the face of obstacles, operate from hope of success rather than fear of failure, and see setbacks as situations to be managed. "*Thomas Edison 'failed' over 10,000 times before producing a working light bulb. When asked how he could persist after 9,999 failures, he replied simply: 'I did not fail 9,999 times. I succeeded 9,999 times in learning how not to make a light bulb.'*"⁴

Final Thought

On one level today's "exploding" interest in Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace can be linked to the century old search for *efficiencies*. Defining and identifying the attributes that predict "star performers" can be seen as one more way of *maximizing yield* while "...expending the least amount of energy, labor, and capital in the process." On the other hand, the skills and attributes that make up Emotional Intelligence are all things we all can develop in our organizations and ourselves. However, a note of caution: research clearly demonstrates that the flavor-of-the-month approach to such development contributes to distrust, cynicism and emotional illiteracy. More on this later.

Part III, "Emotional Intelligence: The Social Competencies." The next Wellness Newsletter looks in detail at the social competencies that matter most for on-the-job effectiveness.

¹ Rifkin, Jeremy, [The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era](#). New York, Tarcher Putnam, 1996.

² Goleman, Daniel, [Working with Emotional Intelligence](#), New York, Bantam, 1998.

³ Goleman, Daniel, [Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ](#), New York, Bantam, 1995.

⁴ Cornelius, Helena and Faire, Shoshana, [Everyone Can Win: How to Resolve Conflict](#), Australia, 1989.

Web Site-Seeing

"How long will you survive on Earth?" If you missed the fortune teller at the Canadian National Exhibition this year and would like to get an educated quasi-scientific guess about "exactly how many revolutions around the sun you'll get before becoming a worm's breakfast" then check out the site at **www.hksrch.com.hk/life.html**. All you have to do is answer a short series of lifestyle questions, click a button and *presto*, your date with the grim reaper appears.

Why would you want to do this? Well, maybe you've been thinking about making some lifestyle changes, like more exercise, less fat food, or less alcohol. The site is a nice private way to play around to see how different behaviour can lead to different results. When you change your answers doomsday gets closer or further, depending on what you tell the questionnaire. Enjoy!

Random Thoughts

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

--- William Butler Yeats ---

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