



EMOTIONS! ISN'T THAT TOO PERSONAL?

by LENA BODIN, MBA, SPHR

Emotions are not personal when they affect the work environment and have to be managed.

I remember a situation years ago when I was managing a customer service team. One day one of the team supervisors came into my office distraught over dealing with a phone rep. She had asked the rep to do something in particular that morning and the rep simply refused. The supervisor insisted and the rep continued to refuse and had some choice words with the supervisor. The rep finally stormed out of her seat and left her station. The supervisor asked another rep to do the task. Later, I sat down with both the supervisor and the rep to do damage control and appropriately discipline the rep. She had difficulty understanding that her job responsibility included having to sometimes stop what she was doing and do what her supervisor asked her to do. The supervisor was also rather mild-mannered and I knew she would often avoid assigning last minute tasks to the rep.

So, what happened in this situation? This isn't dissimilar to situations that we all face from time to time as business leaders although maybe not at the same level. The simple fact was that the supervisor managed the rep's behavior by often avoiding giving her tasks and putting additional burdens on the rest of the team members.

Every decision we make is influenced by our emotions. Rivalries and political battles in the boardroom; personality conflicts in work teams; or individual attitudes and negative behavior can impact workplace morale, not to mention productivity. At some point in our business lives, we have all experienced displays of emotional behavior which have broken down lines of communication and have made us uncomfortable. I am sure we can all relate to the story of the individual at work, whom people avoid because that person is "having a bad day." Although we need to ask them to do something for us, or need their assistance to help complete a project with an impending deadline, we prefer to bypass them or put the project on hold until they are in a better mood, than deal with them at that point in time.

Psychologists have been researching the various aspects of emotions and how it correlates to someone's success or failure in careers or personal lives for many years now. New information and research data is being identified continually and yet we have a lot more to discover and understand about this subject.

The concept of Emotional Intelligence is not New...

From as early as the nineteen-fifties, major companies have used personality evaluations in the selection process when hiring key senior level executives. What do you think they were trying to determine through these evaluations? Well for one, maybe aspects such as how well the individual manages stress, their level of self-confidence, decision making capacity, initiative, impulse control, their ability to work with others and also whether or not they will fit into the existing executive team. Of course, now these types of pre-selection evaluations

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are not limited to key executives. Companies are using various assessment tools to effectively determine compatibility, job fit, and predispositions to certain patterns of behavior.

In 1998, when the *Harvard Business Review* published an article on Emotional Intelligence ("EI"), the CEO of Johnson and Johnson was so impressed by the article that he made copies and had it distributed to his top executives worldwide. Similarly, other companies are also recognizing the concept of EI and the importance of soft skills development in their people.

Emotional intelligence can effect an organization in a number of areas:

- Hiring and Retention
- Employee Development
- Employee Commitment and Loyalty
- Customer Attitudes and Loyalty

Research shows that EI can be improved with proper training and coaching by enhancing individual...

- self-awareness and control
- social awareness
- personal influence
- self-motivation

As business leaders, we cannot afford not to consider some of the implications of emotions in the workplace: it impacts productivity and morale, and it impacts how our customers view us and whether they continue to do business with us.

When Dr. Peter Salovey and Dr. John Mayer coined the term emotional intelligence ("EI") in 1990, they described emotional intelligence as having self-awareness and the ability to be aware of others and to use this information intelligently in their interpersonal relations.

They found in one study that when a group of people saw an upsetting film, those who scored high on emotional clarity (being able to identify and name the emotion being experienced) recovered more quickly. In another study, individuals who scored higher in the ability to perceive accurately, to have awareness of others' emotions were better able to adapt to changing social environments.¹

In Salovey and Mayer's 1997 book, "Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence" (Basic Books), emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to reason with emotion in four areas: to perceive emotion, to integrate it in thought, to understand it and to manage it.²

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The term EI did not become popular until psychologist Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, was published in 1995.

On a slightly different track, in Albert J. Bernstein's book *Dinosaur Brains: Dealing With All Those Impossible People at Work*,³ Bernstein talks about the causes of our emotional behavior and how to deal with instinct, emotions and irrationality that often disrupts business environments. Bernstein's premise isn't that dissimilar to Goleman's since they both talk about the amygdala, the prehistoric part of our brain which is our center for emotions or feelings, such as anger, fear, etc. The neocortex is the structure that differentiates mammals from other vertebrates and is the thinking part of our brain. The emotional areas are intertwined with the neocortex in such a way which gives the emotional centers immense power to influence the functioning of the rest of the brain. Our reactions are a combination of our thinking and feeling parts of our brain.

Bernstein says that when the dinosaur brain is in control our thoughts and actions seem so right, so natural and so much like the real us. We do things and react to situations of which we are unaware. Our responses are accompanied by emotional arousal and impaired rational reasoning. Think of the individual at work who is unable to control their emotions and erupts when they feel threatened or finds himself in an uncertain position....

Then, what about IQ?

How often have we heard the lament "... but he was such a smart guy!" when an individual fails in business or in their personal life. Why is it that "smarts" wasn't enough to ensure success in an individual, especially when others had so much hope in that person's abilities to succeed?

We have been conditioned to believe that a person's intellectual intelligence (measured as IQ) is the greatest predictor of success. We automatically assume that people with high IQs will be successful. Schools often use IQ test results to choose children for gifted programs and advanced courses. Some companies even use IQ as a criterion for hiring employees and will seek out Ivy League graduates with high GPA scores. Yet, the emotional indicators have often been neglected. Academic programs are generally geared towards developing intellect while leaving emotional development up to chance. It wasn't until the nineties that University MBA curriculum began to incorporate leadership and other soft skills in response to the needs of the business community.

According to Goleman, "When IQ test scores are correlated with how well people perform in their careers, the highest estimate of how much difference IQ accounts for is about 25 percent. A careful analysis, though suggests a more accurate figure may be no higher than 10 percent, and perhaps as low as 4 percent."⁴

Inabilities to handle emotions can put even the smartest person in a situation where their decision-making capacity becomes impaired. Political battles and workplace rivalries are

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often a product of unmanaged emotions where the individual may make irrational decisions which ultimately results in a bad choice for the organization. Emotional irrationality can infect an entire organization and often starts at the top. Based on the behavior of leaders in an organization, others assume similar behaviors which ultimately form the culture in the organization. The CEO who is yelling and screaming will, almost invariably, instill that behavior in his rank and file employees and this behavior can spill into the customer service areas.

What Does This All Mean?

Research has shown that employees are more likely to leave organizations because of their supervisor as opposed to pay or other conditions. According to Cherniss and Goleman, people with good bosses are four times less likely to leave than those with poor bosses.

Change needs to start with the business leaders and group leaders in organizations. According to D. W. Thompson, a well known management guru, "The best way to change someone's behavior in a work setting is to change his or her manager's behavior."⁵ For decades before EI, management books were written on developing self-awareness and on becoming better managers of people.

I remember a situation once where I coached a sales person. We spent a lot of time working on his issues with his sales manager instead on spending it on his sales skills. His manager's management style was negatively impacting this sales person's morale where he wasn't able to fully concentrate on selling. This manager's behavior was also impacting the morale of the others in the sales force. Finally, with feedback from others on the sales force, I approached the Director of Sales and discussed at length my concerns. The manager had a way of berating each sales person during the sales team meetings and making fun on their inabilities to close on a prospective sale. I was assigned to work with the manager and it took me sometime to realize he wasn't willing to change his behavior and finally had to be moved out of the position. The new manager was very good with his team and had the personality to understand and put his sales people at ease. I noticed he was a great motivator of the force where each sales person enjoyed the group sales meetings and started getting competitive with each other.

We all come together at work from diverse backgrounds with diverse skill sets. Each of us have our own set of personalities which may complement or clash in the workplace. Coaching or helping individuals develop better self-awareness and social-awareness skills can become effective in enhancing the work environment. Sometimes removal of individuals may be necessary since the power to develop the right set of "soft" skills is ultimately up to the individual.

Available research suggests that emotional competence in individuals reflects higher rates of success in organizations. As we continue to do research in this area we continue to discover new information that reinforces previous findings.

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For business leaders, the time to act is always, especially in a downturn in economy where individuals at work have greater responsibilities and companies are having to do with lot fewer people. This is the time when enhancing emotional competencies can help increase performance in the workplace, maintain satisfied customers, and ultimately, add to the bottom-line.

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 5. Thompson, D.W. [Managing People: Influencing Behavior](#). St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1978.

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