

Developing Emotional Intelligence

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Studies have shown that it is the presence of a higher EQ that differentiates a technically able leader from a highly successful one. Leaders who have a high level of EQ are simply more successful at interacting and working with others- whether it be clients, colleagues, or other professionals. They are able to read people more accurately, understand their concerns, and use empathy which builds trust and helps them to gain valuable insights into others stated and unstated concerns. They are also more likely to listen carefully, take all viewpoints into account and recognize how another's emotions are being impacted. All of these behaviors help to build trusting and long-term partnerships.

How does one develop EQ?

The good news is that unlike some of the hard-wired personality traits and IQ scores which remain fairly consistent from age 8 to 80, Emotional Intelligence skills can be developed.

Daniel Goleman, the internationally known expert and author on the topic of emotional intelligence explains that it is a product of Personal and Social Competence. Possessing awareness of ourselves, our own emotions and managing how we handle those emotions as well as how tuned in we are to others and are able to relate to them. Below are a few strategies that you can begin practicing immediately to help you develop core EQ skills.

Developing Self-Awareness

The focus of EQ starts with ourselves and involves developing more self-awareness about our own emotions and the triggers that set us off. It requires being able to take a step back to understand what type of immediate reactions are happening "in the moment". When working with others, being aware of what triggers their emotions can help them remain calm under stress and positively influence the situation, particularly in challenging client cases and encounters.

To increase self-awareness, try this exercise a few times daily:

Begin paying more attention to how you are feeling at various moments during the day. Ask yourself the following reflective questions:

- *What am I thinking about at this moment? How am I feeling?*
- *If I had to name this feeling what would I call it? Give it a name.*

Once you are practiced at doing this by yourself, try it during a client meeting- both before and during the meeting. Notice if anything in particular “triggers” a certain emotion- perhaps a client’s tone of voice, body language or words being spoken?

This exercise helps you accomplish several important things - first, it helps you begin to develop a language for your emotions and start to notice patterns of what triggers set you off. Second, research has shown that simply naming an emotion actually helps to quell it. UCLA psychologist Matthew Lieberman, PhD. conducted studies using MRI brain scans and found that by simply naming a troubling emotion, you can calm yourself and your brain down. Learning to calm yourself down before responding to others will help to deepen your connections with other people.

Once we are aware of our emotions and some of the situations that trigger them, we can learn to manage or control our emotions -- not suppress them. It’s important to know which feelings are appropriate to express in particular situations, and involves not only what we say but also how it is expressed in our body language and facial expressions.

Practicing Empathy

Empathy is experiencing the world of another by thinking beyond yourself and your own concerns. It does not mean being “nice” or even sympathetic, it means that you can recognize emotions in others and begin to understand the other person’s reality. It is an active process and involves being curious and fully attentive to the perceptions of other’s thoughts and feelings which in turn gives them a sense of connection and caring. To practice empathy, try doing the following during your next client interaction.

- *Put aside your viewpoint, and try to see things from their point of view.*
- *Validate their perspective. It’s important to remember that acknowledgement does not always equal agreement. You can accept that people have different opinions from your own, and that they may have good reason to hold those opinions.*
- *Listen.*
 - *Listen carefully to what the other person is trying to communicate.*
 - *Use your ears – hear what is being said, and how it is being expressed. What tone is the message being delivered with?*
 - *Use your eyes – focus on the other person’s body language- is it telling you anything about how they are feeling?*
 - *Use your instincts – do you sense that the person may be holding something back that might be important?*
 - *Listen with your heart – what do you think the other person is feeling?*

Other EQ skills include adaptability and flexibility which means you may need to make a habit of letting go of some of your natural tendencies and adapting your behavior.

In conclusion, the argument for developing emotional intelligence skills for leaders should be clear-cut even to those with a tendency toward skepticism. The research is sound, those who develop their EQ skills can reap a number of benefits, including building and maintaining high value partnerships with their clients, an enhanced ability to lead and influence others, resolve conflict and build stronger relationships. Most importantly it can help you build and sustain a much more rewarding career and help to shape a high performance culture within your organization.

Find out how you can develop your EQ skills further by contacting QMS~ Quintessential Management Solutions today!