

## The Case for Emotionally Intelligent Lawyers



*Emotional intelligence is an essential part of the whole person.*

by Colleen Franca

Of all professionals joked about, lawyers seem to be the most popular target. A profusion of lawyer jokes casts them as overconfident, egotistical, untrustworthy, tactless individuals who are indifferent and lack emotion. Do they really deserve such disdain even if it is a joke?

Based on the lawyers I know and have worked with I don't think so, but recent research conducted may help explain the reason they get a bad rap as studies using various instruments designed to assess personality traits found that certain distinct types of people are drawn to the law profession.

### Key Findings of Personality Assessments

One troubling finding of the **Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)** study was that as a group, lawyers scored below the national average in emotional intelligence particularly in the area of accurately perceiving their own and others emotion's and that puts them at a deficit in key areas that could help them connect with and build relationships with others.

Studies using the popular personality assessment tool **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** revealed that the majority of lawyers have a preference for Introversion over Extroversion, preferring to keep to themselves and reflect inwardly before sharing information with others. An even stronger preference surfaced for Thinking over Feeling (78% of lawyers vs. 47% of general population) which explains why lawyers are so drawn to facts and logic above all else, even if it means damaging a relationship.

MBTI studies also revealed that one type in particular: INTJ (Introversion, Intuition, Thinking, Judging) occurred with 5 time's greater frequency in lawyers than in the general population. INTJs are characterized as being able to assess situations with a critical eye, quickly identify problems and make fact-based decisions. They are theoretical and tend to

see patterns when looking at large amounts of data and are able to formulate hypothesis quickly. The down-side to some of these tendencies is that INTJs also prefer working alone, do not readily share information with others and may appear distant, aloof and disinterested in others opinions and ideas.

Studies using the Caliper pre-hire assessment tool used to measure job fit, found that lawyers as a group measured high for Skepticism (93rd percentile) and Autonomy (89<sup>th</sup> percentile), and extremely low for Sociability (7th). Skepticism and autonomy can be very useful when conducting analysis and research, but can appear cynical and argumentative to others and building rapport and connecting with others does not come easily for those with low sociability.

### **So what does this all mean for lawyers?**

It makes sense that lawyers excel at dealing with the abstract and intellectual concepts of law, have a natural ability to handle complex problems but since the publication of Daniel Goleman's book titled: *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, it has become widely acknowledged that the presence of emotional intelligence in an individual is a critical factor for building and sustaining relationships with others.

Studies have shown that it is the presence of a higher EQ that differentiates a technically able lawyer from a highly successful one. Lawyers 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 a client's stated and unstated concerns. They are also more likely to listen carefully, take all viewpoints into account and recognize how their client'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.

Goleman outlines that emotional intelligence 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". For lawyers especially, 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**

In the attorney-client relationship, empathy is experiencing the world of the client 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 to the entire message that the other person is trying to communicate.
  - Listen with your ears – what is being said, and what tone is being used?
  - Listen with your eyes – what is the person doing with his or her body while speaking?
  - Listen with your instincts – do you sense that the person is not communicating something important?
  - Listen with your heart – what do you think the other person feels?

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

In conclusion, the argument for developing emotional intelligence skills for lawyers should be clear-cut even to those with a tendency toward skepticism. The research is sound, lawyers 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 lawyers build and sustain a much more rewarding practice and career and help to shape a high performance culture within their organizations – and that is no joke.

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