

Michigan CONSTRUCTOR

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**Leading with
Emotional
Intelligence**

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Leading with Emotional Intelligence

By Trudy Shay Petty

“As children in our early school years we are graded on “playing well with others.” It becomes even more important later in life as our success depends on positively managing our emotions and working well with others. Construction is a people business and emotional intelligence has an important role to play.”

Bart Carrigan, President, AGC of Michigan

Most of us know a story about a highly intelligent, highly skilled individual who was promoted into a leadership role only to fail or fall short at the job. We also know a story about someone with solid but not exceptional intellectual abilities and technical skills who was promoted into a similar role and then excelled. Each of these anecdotes supports the widespread belief that identifying individuals with the “right stuff” is more art than science.

Too often, companies judge people solely on their IQ or intellectual level or by their years of experience in a particular field as leading determinants of success. Consider the situation in which two individuals are vying for the same position. Both have similar intelligence and experience or one might even demonstrate superior intelligence. If you had an opportunity to hire both individuals, research consistently shows the one who will truly excel in performance and be more successful is the individual who demonstrates a stronger sense of self and understanding about their emotions and who is able to relate better to others.

In Daniel Goleman’s best-selling books *Emotional Intelligence* and *Emotional Intelligence at Work*, he makes a compelling case that “the most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of what is called emotional intelligence.” Goleman says “it’s not that IQ and technical skills are irrelevant. . .they do matter, but mainly as entry-level requirements for executive positions.” His research clearly shows that without emotional intelligence, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive analytical mind and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he or she still won’t make a great leader.

What is Emotional Intelligence (known as EI or EQ)

Emotional intelligence is about becoming more honest and intentional with our emotions. It is about tuning into our own feelings, and turning our attention to the feelings of those around us. In a nutshell, emotional intelligence is a powerful combination of self-management skills and the ability to work with others.

Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important for Leaders and Organizations

Most of us know emotions are a fundamental part of who we are as human beings, and it is what comes into play when we are working with others. However in so many cases, “check your emotions at the door” and “emotions and work don’t mix,” are the popular messages we have heard or even said ourselves to coworkers and employees. We have been conditioned to believe emotions are a distraction and not welcome in the workplace. We are often told that to be effective, we need to be fact-based, objective and all-business—in other words, exhibit a cold, logical and reasoned approach to situations.

What has now become crystal clear is emotions can’t be left out of the business setting. In fact, to do so often guarantees that suppressed emotions will flare, causing increased conflict and poor employee morale. As emotional intelligence increases, the quality of relationships increase both internally and externally—evidence shows a direct correlation between a high degree of emotional intelligence and an ability to deliver superior customer service.

The truth of the matter is the degree of emotional intelligence is thought to be a better predictor of success or leadership capability than one’s IQ. Emotional intelligence explains why, despite equal intellectual capacity, training or experience, some people excel while others of the same caliber lag behind.

A Better Understanding of Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman, the five basic components of emotional intelligence at work include:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social Skill

#1 SELF-AWARENESS – this is the foundation supporting all of the other emotional intelligence competencies. It must come first because if we don’t know ourselves and what we’re feeling, how can we possibly know or understand someone else? Self-awareness is about knowing our strengths and weaknesses. It is about listening and learning from your gut feelings. It has to do with knowing what drives us and what we are passionate about. It leads to jobs that make us happy and more productive.

It also leads to relationships, both personal and professional, where we’ll be more constructive and positive. The more we know about ourselves, the better we are able to control and choose what kind of behaviors we’ll display in a work setting. Without self-awareness, our emotions can blind us and guide us to do things we really don’t want to do. If we are aware of our feelings and thoughts, we can choose how we will act or react in a given situation or to a certain person.

TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS:

- Learn the difference between thoughts and feelings—“The project is over budget” (what I think) or “I am concerned these cost overruns will upset our client” (what I feel and what the client feels).
- Ask yourself how you are feeling throughout the day and be honest—For example, if your heart is racing, are you feeling excited or anxious? If feelings are painful to you, it’s better to face them now than rationalize them away where they come back to haunt you.
- Be open to input from others. Asking for and receiving feedback is invaluable to learning more about yourself.

#2 SELF-REGULATION – once we are in tune with our feelings, the second step is to regulate those feelings and manage them so they do more good than harm. Our passion and enthusiasm can be contagious and energize others. Blowing up in front of or at others can damage work relations beyond repair. Self-regulation is about giving the rational side time to temper our emotions and feelings when needed.

When we are angry or frustrated, we cannot make good decisions and often react inappropriately by blowing a situation out of proportion, thus losing our perspective. By learning to manage our emotions, we become more adaptable and innovative, especially in stressful situations.

Self-regulation helps us act intentionally and not reactively. Those who manage their emotions well, typically handle stress well, their communication is frequent and consistent, and they tend to participate more in give-and-take feedback.

TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR SELF-REGULATION:

- Monitor your “self-talk” so it’s more positive. Focus on telling yourself “I can do this,” rather than “This will never work.”
- Anticipate emotional “triggers” that can set you off and prepare to manage them.

Reframe an irritating situation so it is more about the behavior and not the person.

#3 MOTIVATION – the third step is about directing the power of our emotions toward a purpose that will motivate and inspire us. Motivation is about visualizing the achievement of a goal and taking the necessary steps to get there. Effective leaders can create a work environment that is conducive or supportive to motivating others but they cannot motivate or change someone else—only that person has the power to do this for themselves.

Athletes use their emotions to psyche themselves up for competition. The same technique is effective in the workplace to raise job performance. Highly self-motivated individuals realize that every job has its less enjoyable elements but they plow ahead—they can envision reaching the goal, which gives meaning to the mundane. They also accept change and are more flexible. They have better attitudes, take more initiative and do balanced risk taking. Most of all, self-motivated employees persist toward goals, despite setbacks and obstacles.

TIPS TO BOLSTER YOUR MOTIVATION:

- Be aware of how you explain setbacks to yourself—stay realistic and understand the part you played.
- Connect your goals with your values to get energized.
- Use visualization techniques in challenging situations to experience the feelings before the situation occurs. This will allow you to be more prepared and calm when it is happening.

#4 EMPATHY – this competency is about being able to see and feel things from another person’s perspective. “Walking in someone else’s shoes,” “feeling someone’s pain or frustration,” and “experiencing someone else’s joy,” are all expressions of empathy. It begins with listening to the words that are spoken, and the feelings behind the words. This is often demonstrated in a person’s body language, which is 90 percent of all communication.

Being attuned to customers or clients’ needs and emotional responses is particularly important in the service industries, including construction, where empathy comes into play at so many levels. Some consider empathy to be the glue that can bind a group or team together to work successfully.

TIPS TO ENHANCE YOUR EMPATHY:

- Look for nonverbal cues as well as listening to verbal cues to gauge someone’s emotional response.
- Share and be honest about your feelings so others will be more inclined to reciprocate.
- Be consistent so your spoken and unspoken messages match.

#5 SOCIAL SKILL – by mastering the first four competencies, the way is paved for attaining a greater skill in forming effective relationships. The fifth competency is about interacting with people successfully and being adept at managing emotions in others.

The biggest pay-off for leaders who are good at effective relationships is becoming the kind of individual people want to work for, which leads to employee retention.

Dissatisfied employees who leave means instability and disruption to a company, not to mention the added cost of hiring and training replacements.

With enhanced social skills, leaders are better communicators and collaborators. Current research indicates more than anything else, leadership practices have the most impact on a work environment.

TIPS TO MORE EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

- Create an inspiring work environment—in the office and in the field—show appreciation toward others.
- Be willing to coach or mentor others and be open to being coached yourself.
- Share your passion and enthusiasm for your job, the project and the company’s vision—it’s contagious!

Can Emotional Intelligence Be Learned?

Yes! Typically, training is customized for a particular group, relying heavily on a one-on-one coaching component and performance feedback. Often 360-degree assessment tools provide important feedback for contradicting or affirming self-perceptions, which can

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accelerate EI development. EI training is included in many leadership development programs.

Emotional Intelligence Can Impact Your Bottom Line

As the pace of workplace change increases and greater demands are placed on our cognitive, emotional and physical resources, emotional intelligence has emerged, not as something “nice to have” but as an increasingly important set of “must-have” skills. Numerous studies document impressive, quantifiable benefits of selecting and developing leaders with EI in a wide variety of areas, from profit and revenue to retention and growth.

Unlike IQ, an individual’s emotional intelligence can keep growing. Study after study shows it is emotional intelligence that drives the greatest productivity gains, innovations and accomplishments of teams and organizations. Goleman says, “the foundation of all EI training is we are being judged by a new yardstick—not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise—but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other.” ▶

About the author: Trudy Petty is owner of Petty and Associates, a Dallas-based management consulting firm. She works with successful contractors helping them to differentiate their companies especially as it relates to customer service and enhancing the customers’ experience in order to increase satisfaction and achieve client loyalty. She is a frequent speaker and writer on construction industry best practices. Visit pettyandassociates.com or call (214) 341-1713.

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