

HUFFPOST BUSINESS

Emotional Intelligence as a Leadership Predictor

By: Rita Balian Allen, Rita B. Allen Associates, July 2016

Executive Coach, Author, Trainer, Speaker, Leadership Development, Management Training and Career Development Consultant

=====

Everyone is familiar with the term 'intelligence quotient' or IQ as a measure of intelligence. However, is it the best predictor of success especially as a leader? There is another level of intelligence that is viewed equally, if not more importantly, as a measure of potential leadership success and ultimately organizational performance...and that is emotional intelligence or EQ.

Emotional intelligence is our ability to identify and manage our own emotions as well as recognize that of others and groups. It requires effective communication between the rational and emotive centers of our brain – it represents the path between feeling and reason. The brain science surrounding EQ is quite powerful and compelling. As reported by Daniel Goleman in his book, "Primal Leadership, Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence", the four skills that together make up Emotional Intelligence include; self awareness and self management, which are about personal competence; and social awareness and relationship management, which are about social competence. Goleman states "Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head - feeling and thought - meet." Studies have found:

- EQ is a required competency for effective leaders
- EQ is the #1 predictor of professional success & personal excellence
- EQ affects organizational profitability and performance

Our perceptions can differ from person to person and these perceptions influence our thoughts as well as impact our decisions. How aware are we of what we see, think and feel? Do we practice empathy to understand what others see, think and feel therefore identifying similarities as well as differences? Not only understanding but embracing these differences. Ultimately, how well do we see and understand the impact of our thoughts on others and take into consideration others thoughts and needs? We all have beliefs, biases and assumptions that can interfere with our rational thinking at times and cause us to overreact to situations. How well do we know what they are and are we able to contain or manage them appropriately?

In order to manage our emotions effectively, we have to identify them, be able to assess them accurately, understand the root cause, and ultimately control them appropriately. Knowing what the triggers are that drive our emotions as well as understanding triggers of those around us can

truly heighten our ability to communicate more effectively. Conflict is inevitable and actually a positive because it usually leads to progress when handled well. Being able to read the people dynamics, assess the needs involved and manage the situation effectively requires high EQ levels.

“A leader’s intelligence has to have a strong emotional component. He/she has to have high levels of self-awareness, maturity and self-control. He/she must be able to withstand the heat, handle setbacks and when those lucky moments arise, enjoy success with equal part of joy and humility. No doubt emotional intelligence is more rare than book smarts, but my experience says it is actually more important in the making of a leader. You just can’t ignore it.”

~Jack Welch, Former Chairman of General Electric speaking to WSJ

Leadership begins and ends with inner strength requiring the ability to understand ourselves very well while consistently learning, growing and developing. In addition to enhancing self awareness, strong leaders are adaptable to their surroundings, transparent, exhibit positive energy and practice emotional self-control. Effective leaders are empathetic, service-oriented and organizationally aware of their surroundings, reading people and cues well. Lastly, they are relationship builders, inspiring others, influencing effectively, coaches, people developers, team collaborators and able to manage conflict as well as change. All of these are dimensions of emotional intelligence.

There are a number of compelling findings included in Goleman's book. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, the three most significant causes of career derailment for executives involve deficits in emotional competence: 1) difficulty handling change; 2) inability to work well in a team; and 3) poor interpersonal relations. According to Tony Simons, Harvard Business Review, the more associates feel trust in their bosses, an emotional response, the higher the profits for the organization. In one study, a 1/8 point improvement on a survey of employees' perceptions of how much managers earned their confidence increased profitability by 2.5%. That increase in profitability meant a quarter million dollar profit increase per business unit per year. The business case is strong for building emotionally intelligent leaders for positive impact on profitability and performance.

Leaders are life-long learners always looking to further develop their knowledge and skills. In fact, there are a number of assessments that help us to determine our level of emotional intelligence allowing us to identify elements of strength as well as areas for improvement including the highly regarded BAR-ON EQ-i self assessment and 360 tool. There are also several resources available on this topic including the book, Emotional Intelligence 2.0 by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves.

Developing our EQ will be an on-going effort requiring us to push out of our comfort zone. Here are some tips to help build our EQ as we continue to build our leadership capabilities:

- Learn what your triggers are and how they impact your emotions

- Ask for feedback from others often and openly
- Be an active listener, step back and look at things objectively
- Practice deep breathing, relax body, keep a clear mind
- Focus on other people's perspectives and show interest in others
- Take time to learn the norms of the organizational culture
- Carefully read the dynamics of each situation, the people and your surroundings
- Nurture relationships; acknowledge others' needs and feelings
- Manage expectations appropriately
- Welcome the difficult conversations and give direct, constructive feedback

Building emotional intelligence is not only a strong predictor of effective leadership but can contribute to greater productivity, performance and ultimately profitability for all. What level of EQ do you and your leaders possess? Invest in developing your staff and your leadership potential at all levels of your organization. Remember, individuals do not have to be in a leadership role to be a leader. Unleash leadership skills in all!

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, a career management firm specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, management training and career development. She is a lecturer at Boston-area universities, a sought-after speaker and presenter, the author of numerous articles, blogs and the book, *"Personal Branding and Marketing Yourself: The Three Ps Marketing Technique as a Guide to Career Empowerment"*. Rita was voted one of the top ten executive coaches by the Boston Women's Business Journal.