

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace



Let's pretend that you are about to begin the morning of a particularly busy day at the clinic. Before the day begins, you have a fairly heated argument with your spouse before you leave home. It's not a big argument, but it's enough of an argument to ensure that your morning doesn't get off on the right foot. Then, traffic on the 405 is worse than most mornings, upping your stress level a bit more. When you finally arrive to the office, you find that the files for today's patients were not pulled the previous evening as you expected. This now means there will be a delay in rooming the patients, who are already frustrated with the growing delays. The new clinic assistant—who was supposed to help pull the files the previous evening—bears the brunt of your anger as you blurt out “what is wrong with you?! Can't you do anything right?!” as you storm off in a huff.

What caused your reaction? Was it the incident with the files that made you so upset, or was your anger building up inside of you before you even left the house? Either way, it cannot be argued that your emotional intelligence (EQ) played a key role in how you processed the situation.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

EQ is the ability to identify, use, understand and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, and diffuse conflict. When people are asked

to work together towards a common goal, emotional intelligence or EQ, will inevitably play a role. Statements like, “leave your emotions at the door,” and “don't bring your personal problems to work,” are variations of the argument that emotions have no place at work. In reality, emotions are one of the primary forms of information that human beings process.

Developing emotional intelligence in the workplace means acknowledging that emotions are *always* present, while also consistently striving to do something intelligent with them. The difference between being successful at work or not could come down to the skill with which you use your own emotions and react to the emotions of others.

It's not far-fetched to suggest that most professionals are fairly intelligent people, but even so, there can be huge differences in how well the same people are able to interact with others. For example, the department manager who is a genius when it comes to reports, gathering data, and technical knowledge, may lack the skills needed when it comes to interacting with colleagues and creating connections with the people who report to him/her.

Four Branches of Emotional Intelligence

To understand the complexities of emotional intelligence, it is helpful to view EQ as made up of four “branches”:

1. Recognizing Emotion

This includes being aware of what you are feeling *and* figuring out how other people are feeling too. It is especially crucial to develop the ability to read emotional clues from those whom we serve. For example, if a patient is frustrated, confused or experiencing discomfort, his facial expressions and other non-verbal cues can give us clues as to what he is feeling. The ability to accurately perceive emotions in the face or voice of our pa-

tients can play a critical role in fulfilling our vision to heal humankind, one patient at a time, by improving health, alleviating suffering and delivering acts of kindness.

2. Facilitating Emotions

Developing the ability to facilitate emotions requires empathy. Are you able to see a long line of frustrated patients and put yourself in their position? Using empathy in that situation, instead of anger, allows you to react with the compassion, tolerance, and respect that our patients and colleagues deserve.

3. Understanding Emotions

Understanding emotions, is not the same as recognizing emotion. Recognition without understanding can lead someone to say: “I see that you're upset and frustrated that it's taking so long to see the doctor, but frankly there's nothing we can do. You'll just need to have a seat and the doctor will see you when he has the time.” Insensitivity, or the “get over it” approach, can create a barrier to making genuine connections with others.

4. Managing Emotions

After the argument with your spouse, dealing with a congested freeway, waiting patients and missing files—if you are able to avoid inflicting your anger inappropriately on others, then you are managing your emotions. Charismatic, successful, and well-respected leaders have advanced skills in this fourth branch.

Putting it All Together

Research shows that the development of cognitive intelligence decreases significantly around the age of twenty—*however*, your emotional intelligence continues to develop throughout your life. In fact, emotional intelligence grows with personal experience, life observations, maturity, and above all, practice! Taking the time to understand and manage our emotions can be the key to success and happiness in the workplace and in our personal lives as well. Remember, *it begins with U!* 

Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work for You

Don't Give Up Your Power!

It's important to always remember that we all have choices. You choose to be nice to the colleague who may drive you crazy sometimes. You choose to be pleasant to the patient yelling at you on the phone because of a billing error. It's no small thing for you to recognize that *you are the one who is making the choice*. Nothing is gained from feeling as if you're a victim of your circumstances. Reacting in a constructive way and giving yourself credit for making those choices gives you back that power. You always have the power to affect your own fate!

Attitude Counts

Is the glass half empty or is it half full? The truth is, sometimes it can be a little bit of both. However, the way we choose to view events in our lives can have a dramatic effect on our actions and reactions. Perspective matters—if you choose to spend your day in the office looking for every negative detail about your day, the tasks you are asked to perform, or the people you interact with, nothing will ever get done! **Hint:** It's not always *THEM*, and even if it is, the power to change is still mostly in your hands.

Don't Play the Blame Game

Usually, when something goes wrong there are two types of people: 1) blame-oriented people (e.g., "I demand to know who spilled coffee on the floor of the break room!") or 2) solution-oriented people (they're the ones grabbing a mop or finding paper towels to actually *clean up* the coffee on the break room floor). We're all human, and we all can make mistakes—this fact cannot be avoided. Instead of playing the blame game, it is much more productive to focus our energy *finding a solution to the mistake* instead of merely assigning blame.

Being Right vs. Being Happy

Think about the last time you "won" an argument. How did you feel immediately afterward? Sure, your ego might have temporarily loved the feeling of being right at all costs, but what about the person on the other side who "lost"? Risking your relationships just to feed your ego is not the best strategy to make strong interpersonal connections. Instead, it is best to shift the focus toward building relationships, solving problems, and finding happiness in your life and work. You don't have to be right in every situation in order to be effective, appreciated and happy.

The Possibilities Are Endless

Once you have found your power, begin to see things with a positive attitude, stop playing the blame game, and focus on being happy, the possibilities are emotional peace of mind are endless. The key is to stop focusing on all you don't have and all you aren't getting, and instead focus on what you can achieve and how you can accomplish this with grace and compassion. You carry emotional intelligence within you at all times. Can you find some ways to draw on this power starting today? As always, remember...

it begins with **U**

How well do you deal with your feelings and emotions?

Using the scale below, rate yourself in each of the following seven areas:

1: Not at all 3: So-so 5: Completely

Awareness — When your body feels something (fear, anger, sadness, etc), how much do you notice and affirm your feelings?

1 2 3 4 5

Identification — When you notice that you're feeling something, how well can you identify or name the feeling you are having?

1 2 3 4 5

Acceptance — How "Okay" with you is it when you feel mad, or sad, or afraid?

1 2 3 4 5

Expression — How well do you express your feelings and let them out, as opposed to stuffing or bottling them up inside?

1 2 3 4 5

Release — Once your body feels a negative, uncomfortable feeling, how well can you let go of that feeling and let it dissipate?

1 2 3 4 5

Replace — How skilled are you at replacing "negative" feelings (anger, sadness, grief) with more "positive" ones (love, joy, peace)?

1 2 3 4 5

Rejoice — How well do you encourage and respect your feelings, complementing yourself for your awareness and expression?

1 2 3 4 5

Scoring: Add up your 7 answers. If your score is between:

25-35 — You are fully aware of what's happening inside you. Way to go! Our guess is that you are pretty happy, in general.

15-24 — There's still plenty to learn. There's a whole world inside you that you may not be fully aware is available. Do some work in this area and you will find more color, life and depth to your life!

0-14 — All is not lost! Read books, articles, or enroll in classes or seminars that can help boost your emotional intelligence and awareness.