

Ten secrets of Emotional Intelligence

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If you've not studied Emotional Intelligence you should, especially if you want to be a top performer. Two powerful reasons back up that statement. First, research shows that the overwhelming difference between top performers and average performers is higher levels of Emotional Intelligence. The second reason? Emotional Intelligence is totally learnable.

Emotional Intelligence (what many call "EQ") is a type of skill or intelligence that enables you to perceive and assess the emotions, desires, and tendencies of yourself as well as of those around you, and make the best decision for all concerned that moves everyone in the direction of a common goal.

There's a lot in that definition. To succeed, one must start with some essential understandings and also become a student of the different styles of behaviors (four core styles exist), different human values (six basic value systems provide a good start), and different thinking styles (four distinct measurements form the most common models).

One could spend years studying these things, and in fact, many do, usually finishing with a psychology degree. But for us non-psychologist types, we can still learn what makes people tick.

Four-fifths of the difference between top and average performers is higher EQ. Contrary to popular belief, it's a relatively simple undertaking. Also, since more than two thirds of the difference between top performers and average performers is EQ, it's practically a no-brainer to study it if you want to be a top performer.

By the way, if you're in a top leadership position, the reason to study is even stronger: in senior positions, four-fifths of the difference between top and average performers is higher EQ.

Setting the foundation

A detailed explanation requires more space than what's available here, but we do have room to set the foundation. What follows are ten essential understandings about relationship management that some say ought to be common sense.

But after 20+ years of working with managers at all levels and across a wide spectrum of industries, I've found too many people who have not yet learned these things. Therefore, if your work involves dealing with people (most jobs do), and you want a foundation upon which you can build your emotional intelligence skills, here are a few things to know:

1. In the realm of personality styles, we should drop the ideas of "good" and "bad." People are just different.
2. People often equate "different" with "difficult." In reality, different is difficult only because people haven't learned to work effectively with the differences.
3. In the same way that a stick has two ends, people have strengths and weaknesses. All strengths have an associated weakness, and all weaknesses have an associated strength. You choose which end of the stick will receive your attention.
4. All personality styles add to team strength; it's just a matter of focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. By focusing on strengths you'll get stronger. By focusing on weaknesses, you'll get weaker.

5. Seeking the strengths in differing styles does not come naturally — it takes constant effort.
6. We cannot be effective if we expect everyone else to meet us on "our turf."
7. We cannot assume we know another person's definition of "win." We may have a general idea, but to truly be effective we must ask.
8. If we place personal goals over those of others, the team, and/or the organization's vision and mission, we create divisions. This severely weakens our ability to maximize results.
9. Effectiveness has to do with doing the right thing, efficiency has to do with getting things done fast. When working with people, effectiveness is rarely efficient. The best results usually come when we take the necessary time in our relationships to do things right.
10. It's one thing to understand these things, it's another thing to do them. The longest road can be the 18 inches between your head and your heart.

The best place to start

After internalizing these essential understandings, many people want to start studying others around them. Not a good idea. According to the majority of literature on leadership and the EQ model itself, the best place to start is by becoming more self-aware. I suggest people select one of the core behavioral spectrums and dig in.

Let's select "problem solving" as an example. Start by examining the pros and cons about the way you solve problems (remember that every strength has a weakness and every weakness has a strength). Then examine other ways problems can be solved, only be careful, because what you view as a weakness also has a correlating strength. As I pointed out in number three above, which end of the stick receives your focus is up to you.

Also, as stated above, being successful at this takes continual effort, and nothing works well if we expect everyone else to meet us on our turf.

By the way, if you think you lack the self-discipline to study these things on your own, think about getting a coach. Either way, if you want to increase your ability to be a top performer, dig in!

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