

# Emotional intelligence

Communication trainer **Jennifer MacKay** tells us what this is and why we need it

**D**aniel Goleman's 1995 bestseller *Emotional Intelligence, Why it can matter more than IQ* put the concept of emotional intelligence, or EQ, in the spotlight. But what does emotional intelligence mean and why is it important?

Boiled down, emotional intelligence means understanding your own emotions and those of others. You may now be saying to yourself: "EQ sounds reminiscent of 'treat people as you'd like to be treated', 'don't talk with your mouth full' and other basic mantras that I learned in school". Maybe it is. But if it is that basic, why do we continue to mismanage emotions?

How often do we seriously think about our emotions, our own values and goals. These factors contribute to who we are, what we think and how we respond to different situations. We spend even less time thinking about the emotional make-up of others.

But let's consider what might happen if we did. How might it improve our work lives? Goleman believes there are five components of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness** - knowing your own emotions and how they can impact on others;
- **Self-regulation** - knowing how to control these emotions;
- **Motivation** - knowing what internally motivates you to achieve your goals;
- **Empathy** - understanding other people's emotions and how to respond to them; and
- **Social skill** - knowing how to manage your relationships.

Your school teacher was right. The basics provide a good grounding. In EQ terms, these basic components enable us to have more meaningful communication,

better relationships and increase our efficiency.

## WHY IS EQ IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS?

Think back for a moment. Have you ever been on a team that has struggled to achieve its goals because they couldn't resolve conflict? Or maybe you've said something in frustration that you have later regretted? If so, you know what can happen when we stop using our EQ.

We all make emotional mistakes. It is part of being human. But emotional derailments cost time and money and can take a long time to mop up. EQ helps us to minimise the frequency and intensity of nasty situations. And when they do occur, EQ then helps us to deal with them appropriately.

In the first instance, EQ teaches us to be sensitive to what is going on emotionally, both inside ourselves and others. By doing this we can equip ourselves to make better choices about our interactions.

EQ reminds us that there are other opinions and responses than just our own. This mindset can increase our empathy for people, particularly those we find more challenging.

An added benefit of having a high EQ is that it encourages trust. In your profession, people frequently look to you for advice and guidance. Whether you are interacting with clients, colleagues, managers or board directors, trust and relationships are fundamental to your working life.

The ability to build rapport, listen and ask questions - and to recognise when someone is uncomfortable - is an asset. People will want to work with you

SELF-REGULATION

MOTIVATION

because they see you as reliable. But this is not just about being nice, reliable and sensitive. Ultimately EQ allows you to manage emotion and its associated stress and to focus on the task that needs to be achieved.

As a result you can be clear-headed when team meetings get heated, when you need to break bad news to clients or negotiate your next salary rise.

As a young professional at the start of your career, learning these skills now will serve you well going forward.



SELF-AWARENESS

SOCIAL SKILLS

EMPATHY



the information their answers provide allows you to make more constructive contributions to the task in hand.

### 3. Top tips for coping

- Pause - if you feel emotion rising, pause, take control of it, then respond.
- Get clarity by calmly asking a question.
- Focus on the bigger picture.

### HOW CAN EQ HELP YOU IN YOUR CAREER?

If you still think EQ belongs in the therapy room not the boardroom, read on. A FD client of mine recently said he'd rather hire an accountant who was good at accounting and excellent at communication than the other way around. He is not alone.

From interviews to promotions, emotional intelligence plays a role. HR departments look for it when they recruit. The organisation will look at how you use yours when considering you for promotion. In other words it is looking for people with both IQ and EQ.

Research shows that people with higher EQs do better. In his article *What makes a leader*, Goleman writes: "When I calculated the ratio of technical skills, IQ and emotional intelligence as ingredients of excellent performance, emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as the others for jobs at all levels."

It's not enough just to be good at reading the balance sheet. To truly contribute to the success of clients, your team and your career, you must read and respond meaningfully to people too. ■



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### WHAT CAN YOU DO TO DEVELOP YOUR EQ?

Wherever you sit on the EQ scale, the good news is that you can develop your skills through some simple exercises.

#### 1. Tune into your emotions

Ask yourself:

- How do certain situations make me feel?
- What emotions do they bring out in me (anger, fear, resentment...)?
- What happens to me physically (body language, eye contact, voice)?
- What patterns do I notice? (identifying

these patterns helps you to predict future reactions.)

- What can I do to manage the impact?

#### 2. Tune into others' emotions

Get yourself to:

- Observe others - what is their body language, eye contact and voice saying?
- Listen - don't imagine or tweak their words; what are they really saying?
- Ask more questions - questions build rapport; they demonstrate that you are interested in the other person. And