

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: Why It Matters More than Personality

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Emotional Intelligence Quotient, or EQ, is a term being used more and more within human resources departments and which is making its way into executive board rooms. This article will help shed some light on what EQ is, how it is different than personality, and how it has proven to impact the bottom line in the workplace.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence Quotient is defined as a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behaviors, moods, and impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation. Typically, "emotional intelligence" is considered to involve emotional empathy; attention to, and discrimination of one's emotions; accurate recognition of one's own and others' moods; mood management or control over emotions; response with appropriate (adaptive) emotions and behaviors in various life situations (especially to stress and difficult situations); and balancing of honest expression of emotions against courtesy, consideration, and respect (i.e., possession of good social skills and communication skills).

Additional, though less often mentioned qualities include selection of work that is emotionally rewarding to avoid procrastination, self-doubt, and low achievement (i.e., good self-motivation and goal management) and a balance between work, home, and recreational life. In essence, EQ is the pattern of how people's biases in their thinking leads them to think one thing or choice is better than another, as well as their clarity in differentiating within those biases to exercise clear and sound judgment.

"People see what they want to see." —Red Barber

How is EQ Different from Personality?

In psychology, personality refers to the emotion, thought, and behavior patterns unique to an individual. Personality influences one's tendencies, such as a preference for introversion or extroversion. Like Intelligence Quotient (IQ), personality cannot be used to predict EQ. However, as EQ can identify both the biases and clarity in one's thinking patterns that allow them to make good sound decisions, personality only refers to the biases in the behaviors themselves.

Personality tests typically only distinguish four categories of temperament but do not distinguish which melancholy person is actually high in ambition. For example, business people know that they want an extrovert to fill the sales position, but they cannot tell from a temperament test which ones will be persistent from those who will be insistent. It is desirable for salespeople to have persistence, which allows them to have the energy, drive, and thick skin to develop and close new business. Less effective, however are insistent salespeople who 1) turn off prospective buyers because they are too pushy, and 2) cannot give up on a prospect who is not going to buy when they could be focusing their efforts on more promising opportunities. We know we want an extrovert, sensor, thinker, and judger (ESTJ) from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for the vacant leadership role, but we cannot tell which ESTJ will make sound judgments under stress and which ones will maim everyone in his/her path when under stress.

An employee with a "good" personality may be fun, social, energetic, and outgoing. However, having a "good" personality doesn't necessarily equate to success in the workplace. A "good" personality tells you nothing about the fact that the employee can also make errors in judgment due to lack of "clarity" when making decisions within their own biases. This is why people with varying personality styles can successfully perform the same job. It boils down to their ability to exercise clear and sound judgment in those situations their job/role presents on a regular basis.

An employee with high emotional intelligence can manage his or her own impulses, communicate with others effectively, manage change well, solve problems, and use humor to build rapport in tense situations. These employees also have empathy, remain optimistic even in the face of adversity, and are gifted at educating and persuading in a sales situation and resolving customer complaints in a customer service role. This "clarity" in thinking and "composure" in stressful and chaotic situations is what separates top performers from weak performers in the workplace.

As managers and business executives we have often asked ourselves the following questions: Why do certain employees get into accidents more often than others? Why do they violate company ethics and policies? Why do they ignore the rules of the organization? Why do they use illegal drugs while on the job? Why do some people cause conflict while others are so gifted at resolving it? Why do they put self-interest ahead of the organizational values? Why do some salespeople build large books of new business with ease while others struggle to do so even though they seem to be putting forth the required effort?

In many cases the answer to the above questions lies in "emotional intelligence" rather than the individual's "personality type."

"Unmet emotional needs cause the majority of problems at work." —EQI.org

EQ Competencies that Correlate to Workplace Success

The following outlines a set of five emotional intelligence competencies that have proven to contribute more to workplace achievement than technical skills, cognitive ability, and standard personality traits combined.

Social Competencies—Competencies that Determine How We Handle Relationships

Intuition & Empathy. Our awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Understanding others: an intuitive sense of others' feelings and perspectives, and showing an active interest in their concerns and interests
- Customer service orientation: the ability to anticipate, recognize, and meet customers' needs
- People development: ability to sense what others need in order to grow, develop, and master their strengths
- Leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through diverse people

Political Acumen & Social Skills. Our adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Influencing: using effective tactics and techniques for persuasion and desired results
- Communication: sending clear and convincing messages that are understood by others
- Leadership: inspiring and guiding groups of people
- Change catalyst: initiating and/or managing change in the workplace
- Conflict resolution: negotiating and resolving disagreements with people
- Building bonds: nurturing instrumental relationships for business success
- Collaboration and cooperation: working with coworkers and business partners toward shared goals
- Team capabilities: creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals

Personal Competencies—Competencies that Determine How We Manage Ourselves

Self Awareness. Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Emotional awareness: recognizing one's emotions and their effects and impact on those around us
- Accurate self-assessment: knowing one's strengths and limits
- Self-confidence: sureness about one's self-worth and capabilities

Self Regulation. Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Self-control: managing disruptive emotions and impulses

- Trustworthiness: maintaining standards of honesty and integrity
- Conscientiousness: taking responsibility and being accountable for personal performance
- Adaptability: flexibility in handling change
- Innovation: being comfortable with an openness to novel ideas, approaches, and new information

Self Expectations & Motivation. Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Achievement drive: striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence we impose on ourselves
- Commitment: aligning with the goals of the group or organization
- Initiative: readiness to act on opportunities without having to be told
- Optimism: persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks

Emotional Intelligence's Impact on the Bottom Line

To date, many companies have focused their selection criteria and training programs on hard skills (e.g., technical expertise, industry knowledge, education) and the assessment of personality traits. Topics including competencies like stress management, assertiveness skills, empathy, and political/social acumen were never measured in the selection process or focused on in training and development programs. In reality, these are critical success factors that should not be dismissed, and have a direct impact on the bottom line.

For example, the Hay Group states one study of 44 Fortune 500 companies found that salespeople with high EQ produced twice the revenue of those with average or below average scores. In another study, technical programmers demonstrating the top 10 percent of emotional intelligence competency were developing software three times faster than those with lower competency.

Additional research unearthed the following success stories. A Fortune 500 company in financial services proved that their high EQ salespeople produced 18 percent more than the lower EQ salespeople. One recent study conducted by a Dallas corporation measured that the productivity difference between their low scoring emotional intelligence employees and their high scoring emotional intelligence employees was 20 times. A Texas-based Fortune 500 Company had utilized personality assessments for candidate selection for years with little results in reducing turnover in their high turnover sales force. After turning to an emotional intelligence-based selection assessment and EQ training and development program, they increased retention by 67 percent in the first year, which they calculated added \$32 million to their bottom line in reduced turnover costs and increased sales revenues. A large metropolitan hospital reduced their critical care nursing turnover from 65 percent to 15 percent within 18 months of implementing an emotional intelligence screening assessment. A community bank that reduced staff by 30 percent due to the sluggish economy assessed the remaining workforce for their

emotional intelligence competencies, placed them in the right role for those competencies, and the bank is now producing more with less people.

Lastly, through a series of recent studies conducted by ZERORISK HR, Inc., a correlation was found among low emotional intelligence and theft and shrinkage. One other study in the construction industry yielded results showing workers with low emotional intelligence had a higher likelihood of getting injured while on the job.

All of these cases are starting to prove the value of having highly emotionally intelligent employees make up your workforce if you want a competitive advantage in this highly competitive business world.