

## The Basic World of Emotional Intelligence

Emotions are contagious. Who can keep a straight face when a baby is giggling?

### Emotions

Think of your best friend, your child, or your interactions with others in the last meeting you attended. Is that a pleasant memory or an uncomfortable one? Do you find yourself smiling or frowning? Your reaction is based on your emotions. Emotions, an integral part of our daily lives, vary; happiness ranges from contentment through satisfaction to ecstatic, fear varies from worry to unease to panic, and anger fluctuates from irritated or resistant through agitated and disgusted to outraged or seething. If your annoyance is not reduced, it can migrate to anger and escalate to rage. Emotions also carry the past to the future. Sadness is what you feel in the present moment; when you associate that feeling with past actions, sadness becomes regret or remorse. Project sadness into the future and you can experience hopelessness or pessimism.

Emotions are information sent from your mid-brain to your rational mind. This emotional information defines the relationship you have with that person, event or object. As that relationship changes, so do the emotions behind it. When you have a disagreement with a spouse, significant other or good friend, your feelings can change from like to dislike then back to like. You buy a house and feel proud; when house expenses prohibit you from enjoying other activities, you can feel frustrated or annoyed. Your dream car gives you a strong sense of freedom; you can feel constrained or stifled because of its expenses. From these events, you remember how you felt. These emotional memories affect your subsequent thoughts and behaviors. The level in which you understand your emotions and outwardly control those emotional reactions demonstrates your level of emotional intelligence (EI).

Emotions are unconsciously transferred brain-to-brain from one person to another and the most prevalent emotion will permeate a room. How difficult is it not to yawn when you see someone else yawn? Children learn from their parents the different shades of emotion (for example, between a smile, a chuckle and a laugh), and when each is appropriate. Emotions of a positive nature – optimism, happiness, passion – are more likely to elevate creativity, flexibility and foster a more constructive environment. Emotions of a negative nature – pessimism, anger, disgust – raise defenses and lower productivity. Either display causes others to respond in a similar manner.

The key questions to ascertain your own level of EI are:

- how aware of your emotions are you,
- how well do you manage those emotions,
- how astute are you at sensing what others are feeling, and
- what is the best use of these mental and emotional energies that will result in the most productive and appropriate outcome?

## Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Simply put, EI is recognizing and managing your own emotions, sensing what others are feeling, and using that information to achieve the most beneficial outcome. Breaking it down to specific elements:

1. Self-awareness: identifying your own emotions or shift in attitude at the time you are experiencing them, the source and the reason for those emotions.
2. Self-management: expressing your emotions with the proper mix of emotionality, subjectivity and objectivity.
3. Managing relationships: being cognizant of the stated or unstated emotions or shift of attitude or demeanor of others, and responding appropriately to validate their perspective. In doing so, emotional issues are raised and understood, and the parties are able to progress through the situation towards the shared goal.

Each of these has sub-elements that comprise the higher level competencies.

- By understanding your emotions, you can identify the words or actions that cause frustration, anger, or other 'negative' emotions. You can then prepare yourself to avoid over- or under-reacting.
- When you accept your emotions without judgment, you can raise your self-confidence while improving your emotional reactivity.
- By managing your emotions, you curtail your initial reactive impulses. You then are able to objectively assess the situation, acknowledge any assumptions and respond to the situation calmly and rationally.
- Monitoring how others perceive your reactions gives you flexibility to adapt your emotions and behaviors to the situation, minimizing defensiveness.
- Uncovering and diffusing the emotional source of conflict allows a higher level of creativity between team members.
- Appreciating how others feel, especially during challenging times, demonstrates respect for the other person and strengthens your relationship.

Some researchers have disputed the validity or the effectiveness of emotional intelligence. They challenge the soundness and legitimacy of any instrument when one assesses themselves; how accurate can a perspective be if emotions and reactions are viewed through a person's own lens? Others have decided that the study of emotions is not a serious research topic. While the former may be true, the latter has been proven erroneous as emotions are studied by leadership, psychology and neuroscience disciplines. What has been

generally agreed upon is that EI is a separate intelligence in which the level varies from individual to individual; it develops as a person ages and can be learned and improved upon.

## Leadership and EI

Think of your best boss – what characteristics did he/she have? Empathy? Self-confidence? Was he/she in tune with your feelings? Did he/she know what to say and when to say it to you? Was he/she supportive, yet firm? Did you feel he/she looked out for you, your best interests and your career? What emotions do you remember about your ‘best boss’? Now think of your worst boss and do the same thing. Was he/she selfish? Arrogant? Narcissistic? A bully? What emotions do you remember about your ‘worst boss’?

Many people feel more valuable, a stronger sense of self-satisfaction and are motivated to do more for the ‘best boss’ than they were for the ‘worst boss’. Your ‘best boss’ had a higher degree of EI than your ‘worst boss’ did. EI has been called ‘people skills’ or ‘people common sense’.

EI has become more prominent in today’s view of leadership skills. As a result, leaders must be able to ascertain what their team members are thinking and feeling. Studies by Center for Creative Leadership have determined that self-awareness, stress tolerance and empathy are predictors of high leadership performance. A leader has the responsibility to their team to respond appropriately to an emotional situation, whether it is a negative crisis or a positive accomplishment. Leaders that appear aloof and unemotional can suffer a lack of trust and higher turnover from their team members.

## Proven Return on Investment

- 90% of difference between “star performer” and “average” is attributed to EQ (emotional quotient – your level of EI)
- The US Air Force experienced a 92% increase in recruiter retention and over \$2.5M in training costs
- Annual growth rate for a Fortune 100 insurance company was 15% for their general agent teams with higher EI, compared to a -1% for their low performing general agents
- A communications company discovered almost half the skills required for successful leader performance is emotional and social intelligence

## Methods to increase your EI

Raising your EI level takes a very conscious effort on your part. Much like learning how to ride a bicycle, you will probably stumble and fall. The key is to self-assess, self-analyze and try again. Here are two techniques you can begin with:

1. **Managing your own behaviors:** Being conscious of your emotional triggers and counteracting them in a positive manner is the foundation for this area. Understanding your emotional outbursts is good; managing those reactions is more arduous. The acts of counting to 10 and taking deep breaths do have

validity; much like physically moving across the room, or from one room to another – these activities focus your attention on a specific action and allow your rational mind to regain control. These activities stop you from feeling self-consumed and like a victim of circumstances.

2. **Minimizing the emotional reactivity of others:** We talk to stabilize our own emotions. Because we mirror the emotions of others, we can succumb to negative emotions or easily get caught up in happier emotions. Clear your mind of your imminent thoughts and focus all your attention on the other person. Notice their facial expressions (especially their eyes), their hands and the words they use. Offer empathetic expressions (“I’m sorry to hear that”, “I can understand ...”) and encourage them to keep talking through their emotions. Otherwise, you will be fighting logical objectivity with emotional subjectivity, and you will lose.

## Conclusion

Emotions serve a purpose – they alert us to pleasant situations ... and ones that require our attention. They can cause us to think and take appropriate action. Our emotions choose our path – one of confidence, calmness and composure or one of reactivity, chaos and confusion.

## For additional information ....

- Ashkanasy, N.M., & Daus, C.S. (2005). Rumors of the death of emotional intelligence in organizational behavior are vastly exaggerated. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26, 441-452.
- George, J.M. (2000). Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations*, 53(8), 1027-1055.
- Goleman, D. (2004). What Makes a Leader?. *Harvard Business Review*, 82(1), 82-91.
- Mayer, J., Salovey, P., Caruso, D., & Sitarenios, G. (2001). Emotional intelligence as a standard intelligence. *Emotion*, 1(3), 232-242. doi:10.1037/1528-3542.1.3.232.
- Multi-Health Systems (MHS), [http://downloads.mhs.com/ei/MHS\\_Brief\\_ROI.pdf](http://downloads.mhs.com/ei/MHS_Brief_ROI.pdf)
- Nelson, D. B., & Low, G. R. (2003). *Emotional intelligence: Achieving academic and career excellence*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall.

## About Shari Frisinger ....

A resourceful, informative and entertaining speaker and presenter, Shari has researched leader communication styles in stress and changing environments. Her Doctorate in Executive Leadership links neuro-science with emotional intelligence, and their effect on a leader’s ability to successfully manage rapid change. Her expertise lies in leadership communications, conflict resolution and team building, resulting in leaders understanding their own behaviors and the reactions of others. This results in stronger and more cohesive teams, enhanced creativity and innovation, and a positive impact on the company’s bottom line.

Clients utilizing Shari’s RADAR Leadership programs realize increased morale, productivity, retention and loyalty, which equates to a stronger bottom line. Her coaching, consulting and training clients include Chevron, Pfizer, Amway, Texas Instruments, BNYMellon, FirstEnergy and Cessna. She has also had several articles published in the areas of leadership and emotional intelligence, including “Emotionally Enabled” in Flight Safety Foundation’s AeroSafety World magazine.

*When you instinctively react, the situation manages you. Consciously respond and you are in control.*