

# Working Resources

Helping Companies Assess, Select, Coach and Retain Emotionally Intelligent People

## Newsletter

### Managing with Emotional Intelligence: The Power of Empathy

The business community has embraced the concept of emotional intelligence and its importance ever since Daniel Goleman's best-selling book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998). The challenge is to demonstrate that such competencies significantly impact employee performance.

Studies in corporations that have adopted emotional intelligence training have shown that "EI" can be trained and it is effective. There are overall improvements in productivity and profits. Up to 90 percent of the difference between outstanding and average leaders is linked to emotional intelligence. EI is two times as important as IQ and technical expertise combined, and is four times as important in terms of overall success.

### What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize your own feelings and those of others, and the ability to motivate yourself and others, as well as to manage your own emotions and those of others. Essentially, there are four competencies:

1. Understanding yourself, or self-awareness
2. Managing yourself, or self-management
3. Understanding others, or social awareness
4. Managing others, or social skills

Emotional intelligence increases when people commit themselves to building practical competencies in the context of every day situations. For example, nothing can be more powerful than developing empathy skills during everyday conversations on the job.

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We specialize in helping companies assess, hire, coach and keep top talent; executive selection; leadership consulting; 360-degree feedback; change management; interpersonal communication skills; emotional intelligence; performance improvement; culture surveys; career development and executive coaching.

Dr. Brusman is a highly sought-after speaker and workshop leader. He leads mission, values, and vision retreats.

*"Maynard Brusman is one of the foremost coaches in the United States. He utilizes a wide variety of assessments in his work with senior executives and upper level managers, and is adept at helping his clients both develop higher levels of emotional intelligence and achieve breakthrough business results. As a senior leader in the executive coaching field, Dr. Brusman brings an exceptional level of wisdom, energy, and creativity to his work."* —Jeffrey E. Auerbach, Ph.D., President, College of Executive Coaching

He has been chosen as an expert to appear on radio and TV, MSNBC, CBS Market Watch, and in the Wall Street Journal, San Francisco Chronicle, and Fast Company magazine.

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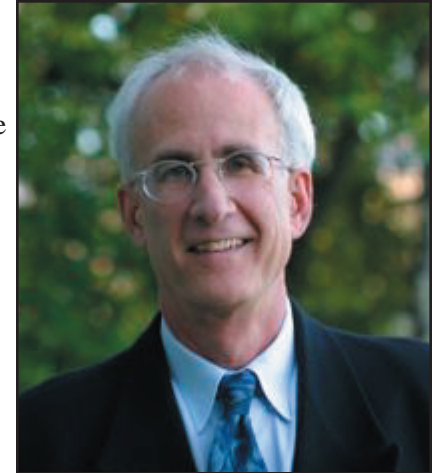
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One of the foundation skills that contributes to a manager's or leader's success is the skill of empathy. It starts with self-awareness. Understanding one's own emotions is essential to understanding the feelings of others. It is crucial to effective communication and to leading others.

Lack of empathy is a primary cause of interpersonal difficulties that lead to poor performance, executive derailment, and problems with customer relationships.

Empathy as a competency skill is poorly understood by those who need it most, and it is even more difficult to train and acquire. Most people believe you either have it or you don't. Many hard-driving managers lack a propensity for developing empathy because they assume it's for the more "touchy-feely" types. Some very intelligent leaders are walking around blindly using only their powers of reasoning and wondering why everyone doesn't see things their way.

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competency, and in particular, these three primary ones:

1. Difficulty in handling change.
2. Not being able to work well as a team.
3. Poor interpersonal relations.

Without an adequate capacity to understand the other's point of view, some managers lack sufficient flexibility for change, cannot work well with team collaboration, and cannot relate well with the very people that affect the results they are trying to achieve.

## What is Empathy?

Empathy can be defined as the ability to see things from the other person's point of view— to be able to "walk in someone else's moccasins." Goleman defines it as the ability to read other people. This implies more than a cognitive understanding, more than just remembering a similar situation that you may have gone through yourself. Empathy means that you can recall some of those same feelings based on your own memories. There is a sharing and identifying with emotional states.

What does this have to do with running a business, managing a company and dealing with bottom-line performance issues? If managers were to take the time to listen with empathy at everything that was said, things might not get done. Furthermore, one cannot fall prey to being swept up into every person's story. Managers and leaders must keep the focus and guide people to goal completion.

According to Goleman, empathy represents the foundation skill for all the social competencies important for work:

1. Understanding others: sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns
2. Service orientation: anticipating, recognizing and meeting customers' needs
3. Developing others: sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities
4. Leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through diverse people
5. Political awareness: reading the political and social currents in an organization

Managers and leaders are usually high in those traits and characteristics that lead to successful goal completion, such as high achievement orientation and high focusing abilities. That's why they get promoted to management positions. Success depends a great deal on having focus, being able to persevere, and to concentrate. But focus alone can result in undesirable consequences if not counterbalanced by empathy. Focus alone will not result in the fulfillment of goals. Focus *and* empathy will.

Empathy skills are those that involve paying attention to other people— for example, listening, attending to the needs and wants of others, and building relationships. When empathy skills are high, one is more likely to inspire the troops. When a manager understands his/her people and communicates that to them, he/she is more liked and respected. That is how practicing empathy results in better performance. When a manager is respected, the people they lead are more likely to go the extra mile. Empathy and focus need to be balanced, and when they are, management skills are optimally effective.

Both managers and employees need empathy in order to interact well with customers, suppliers, the general public and with each other. Managers need it even more when they are assigning a task to someone who won't like it; when offering criticism to someone who predictably will get defensive; when having to deal with someone who isn't liked; when dealing with employee disputes; and when giving bad news such as telling someone that they won't be promoted or that they're being laid off. The first step in dealing with any negativity is to empathize. The next step is to focus back to the goals and the tasks at hand.

At the outset empathy involves real curiosity and a desire to know or understand. There is a genuine interest in what the person is saying and feeling. You cannot have empathy without asking questions. Some typical ones are:

1. "Can you say more about that?"
2. "Really? That's interesting. Can you be more specific?"
3. "I wasn't aware of that. Tell me more."
4. "I'm curious about that...let's discuss this in more depth."
5. "Let me see if I understand you correctly...here is what I hear you say..."

Managers and leaders who are high in empathy skills are able to pick up emotional cues. They can appreciate not only what a person is saying, but also why they are saying it. They understand where a person's feelings might be coming from.

Those that do not have empathy have a tendency to misread the other person. They do not ask questions to clarify. They do not pay attention to non-verbal cues. Those people who are analytical by nature will listen to the words, facts and figures and completely miss the underlying meaning of what is being said.

If we remember that only 7% of the message is carried in the words and the rest is in the non-verbal cues, then listening to the content of what is being said may actually be misleading.

## Learning the Skills of Empathy

**H**ow is effective empathy learned if you are one of those task-oriented managers who is primarily focused on achievement? The good news is that your achievement orientation and focusing abilities will help you in acquiring empathy skills. The bad news is that it may not be natural at first. Fortunately, empathy is a learned capability and like other competencies, it can be acquired.

Here are some steps to take to begin improving empathy as an effective management tool. Like all the emotional competencies, it is better to practice with an experienced coach who can monitor and give effective feedback. Reading a book and taking a class can both help to gain a greater cognitive understanding of what is involved. However, empathy skills must be learned experientially, that is, practiced in the field in real-time.

## Ten Ways to Develop Empathy

1. Keep a note of situations in which you felt you were able to demonstrate empathy and a note when you felt you did not. Make a note of missed opportunities to respond with empathy.
2. Become aware of incidents where there may be some underlying concerns that are not explicitly expressed by others.
3. Make a note of possible emotions or feelings that the other person may be experiencing. Keep an open mind and never assume, merely explore the possibilities.
4. Develop a list of questions to ask at your next encounter with that person. Try to make the questions open-ended, that is, questions that can't be answered by yes or no.
5. Practice listening without interrupting. Wait until the other person is complete with their point of view before offering yours.
6. Avoid being defensive in order to create an open dialogue where possibilities can be explored freely.
7. Allow creative time for people to express opinions and ideas without judgment.
8. Practice active listening: always check out the meaning of what was said with the person speaking. Paraphrasing what was said helps to clear up misconceptions and to deepen understanding.
9. Always bring focus back into the conversation. Remember that optimal effectiveness is achieved by a combination of focus and empathy.
10. Work on achieving an effective balance of focus, goal orientation and empathic listening.

## The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence

The following examples of return-on-investment studies offer a bottom-line rationale for emotional competency training in hiring, selecting, and retaining personnel, developing performance measurements, and in managing customer relationships.

After supervisors in a manufacturing plant received training in emotional competencies (such as how to listen better and how to help employees resolve problems on their own), lost-time accidents were reduced by 50 percent, formal grievances were reduced from an average of 15 per year to 3 per year, and the plant exceeded productivity goals by \$250,000 (Pesuric & Byham, 1996).

In another manufacturing plant where supervisors received similar training, production increased 17 percent. There was no such increase in production for a group of matched supervisors who were not trained (Porrás & Anderson, 1981).

The US Air Force used the EQ-I (Emotional Quotient Inventory, Multi-Health Systems, Toronto) to select recruiters and found that the most successful recruiters scored significantly higher in the emotional competencies of assertiveness, empathy, happiness and emotional self-awareness. They found that by using EI to select recruiters, they increased their ability to predict successful recruiters by nearly three-fold. The immediate gain was a saving of \$3 million annually.

An analysis of more than 300 top level executives from fifteen global companies showed that six emotional competencies distinguished star performers from average: influence, team leadership, organizational awareness, self-confidence, achievement drive, and leadership (Spencer, 1997)

Financial advisors at American Express whose managers completed the Emotional Competence training program were compared to managers who had not. During the year following training, the trained managers grew their businesses by 18.1 percent compared to 16.2 percent of those whose managers were untrained.



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