

Emotional Intelligence and Facilitation

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) is currently a hot topic in facilitation, training and coaching. Although there are many schools of thought on the topic of Emotional Intelligence, they do share a common theme: understanding your emotions, knowing how to express them appropriately, and interacting with others in a constructive manner can help increase your chances for success in life. In fact, EI has been shown to be a stronger indicator than IQ for predicting one's success in corporate environments.

This might sound like a bold statement – that understanding and dealing with your emotions can lead to greater success. Some people are bound to ask, “How can this ‘touchy-feely’ stuff really help me be a better leader in my organization?” Let’s look at an example to illustrate the impact of EI on perceived success in business.

In the process of working with a Senior-level leadership team in a mid-size manufacturing company, Dr. Dick Thompson of High Performing Systems, Inc., asked the team to identify employees at the Manager level who were real “Superstars” in the company. Senior team members were asked to identify employees that they would like to clone if they were able to do so. The result was a list of Superstar performers.

These Superstars were then asked to complete the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory® (EQ-i®), an assessment used to measure Emotional Intelligence. When the Superstars were compared to other employees in the organization, the results were staggering — the Superstars’ average score was over ten points higher than the average of the other employees!

Without knowing the EI scores of the employees in the company, the Senior leaders identified those Managers who had the highest EI scores in the company as being the Superstar performers in the organization. Is it possible that other employees were just as technically proficient as the Superstar group? Of course, but technical expertise is not the only factor in being perceived as a successful Manager. What the other group lacked, and what the Superstars had, is that extra “something special,” the x-factor. Until recently, a vocabulary for describing this x-factor did not exist. Now we have a label to describe this “something special” — Emotional Intelligence.

What does this mean for facilitators, trainers and coaches? Helping your clients identify and improve their Emotional Intelligence can help them become Superstar employees. Even more importantly, becoming aware of and developing your own EI can help you become a Superstar facilitator.

Emotional Intelligence plays a key role in all interpersonal interactions – including your interactions in meetings, one-on-one coaching and counseling. The way you interact with your clients and the way they respond to you are impacted by EI. Understanding EI can help you improve your interaction style and increase your chances for success as a facilitator.

Whether you simply want to understand Emotional Intelligence better on a conceptual level or become a certified administrator of an EI assessment, the benefits of using EI concepts are tremendous. Understanding your clients and being able to adjust your approach with them are critical skills in successful facilitation. EI can help you modify your approach to the style of the group. Knowing the emotional strengths and weaknesses of group members can help you create a plan for facilitation that addresses the needs of the group.

In working with a high Assertiveness group, for example, you might expect challenging questions and participants who aren’t afraid to speak up in class. A group high in Social Responsibility might want to know how to apply the learning to the greater good. A group low in Independence might want to work collectively on a problem and create a group solution. The concept of Emotional Intelligence can offer key insights to the groups and leaders you are working with.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence will enhance your personal success as a facilitator. Knowing your emotional barometer will reveal much to you about your style of facilitation and how you deal with your clients. How well you tolerate stress, handle change, express your emotions, and interact with others are all influenced by EI. As you develop your own Emotional Intelligence skill set, you will be able to help your clients increase their chances of joining the Superstars list.

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