

Successful Supervisor Part 13

Emotional Intelligence

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

I believe the skill of Emotional Intelligence is the single most significant discriminator between highly successful supervisors and those who struggle. While Emotional Intelligence (called EI for short) is of critical importance at all levels of management, it is essential for supervisors who have to juggle the needs of first line employees simultaneously with those of upper level managers. First we will explore what EI is and why it is critical, and then I will describe the process of how any supervisor can gain higher EI.

While the first recording of the phrase Emotional Intelligence was by Michael Beldoch in 1964, the concept was popularized by Daniel Goleman in his book **Emotional Intelligence** published in 1995. Goleman hypothesized four quadrants of Emotional Intelligence as follows:

1. Self Awareness - Ability to recognize your own emotions
2. Self Management - Ability to manage your emotions into helpful behavior
3. Social Awareness - Ability to understand emotions in others
4. Relationship Management - Ability to manage interactions successfully

A more recent book (2009) with easier access is by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves entitled **Emotional Intelligence 2.0**. If you have not been exposed to this book, perhaps my article will whet your appetite to purchase it.

The authors start out by giving a single sentence definition of EI. Emotional Intelligence is "your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships."

The book contains a link to an online survey that lets you measure your own EI. This is an interesting exercise, but it lacks validity, because people with low EI have blind spots as described by Goleman. You might rate yourself highly in EI when the truth, in the absence of blind spots, is somewhat lower. Still it is nice to have a number so you can compare current perceptions to a future state after you have made improvements. Just recognize that your score reflects **your opinion** of your own Emotional Intelligence and that it may or may not be totally accurate.

Most of the book consists of potential strategies for improving Emotional Intelligence in any of the four quadrants described above. You get to pick the quadrant to work on and which strategies (about 17 suggestions for each quadrant) you think would work best for you. The approach is to work on only one quadrant, using three strategies at a time for the most impact. The authors also suggest getting an EI Mentor whom you select. The idea is to work on your EI for six months and retest for progress, then select a different quadrant and three appropriate strategies for that one.

The most helpful and hopeful part of the book, for me, is where the authors discuss the three main influences on our performance: Intelligence, Personality, and Emotional Intelligence. The observation is that it is almost impossible to change your IQ (Intelligence) and very difficult to change your Personality, but without too much effort, you can make a huge improvement in your EI. The improvement opportunity is to train your brain to work slightly differently by creating new neural pathways from the emotional side of the brain to the rational side of the brain.

We are bombarded by stimuli every day. These stimuli enter our brain through the spinal cord and go immediately to the limbic system, which is the emotional (right) side of our brain. That is why we first have an emotional reaction to any stimulus. The signals normally have to travel to the rational (left) side of the brain for us to have a conscious reaction and decide on the best course of action. To do this, the electrical signal has to navigate through a kind of ribbon in our brain called the Corpus Callosum.

The Corpus Callosum is a flat belt of approximately 300 million axonal fibers in the brain that connects the right and left hemispheres. How easily and quickly the signals can move through the Corpus Callosum determines how effective we will be at controlling our emotions. This is a critical part of the Personal Competency model as described by Goleman.

Now the good news: whenever we are thinking about, reading about, working on, teaching others, etc. about Emotional Intelligence, what we are doing is training our Corpus Callosum to transfer the signals faster. This means that working with the concept of EI is an effective way to improve our effectiveness in this critical skill. Let's take a closer look and share an example of how this training can help prevent a situation called "hijacking" where a person over reacts to a stimulus before thinking about the consequences.

People with low EI, often lash out at others based on the emotional response to a stimulus in a process often called "hijacking." In this case, the emotional outburst is not tempered by a rational judgment of the consequence of that response. A good example of a person experiencing hijacked emotions occurred at a basketball game in 2014, as described below.

At a critical moment near the end of a basketball game between Syracuse and Duke, the referee made a call that the Syracuse coach, Jim Boeheim, called "the worst call of the season." The score was 58-60 in favor of Duke with only 10 seconds left in the ballgame when a basket by a Syracuse player, C.J. Fair, was waived off for what the official called a charging violation.

Boeheim obviously did not agree with the call, but he totally lost his wits and charged the ref while stripping off his coat and yelling over and over that the call was "Bulls%*#." He stuck his finger right between the eyes of the official. As a seasoned coach, Jim would have been well aware of the consequences of his actions before he did them. SU was slapped with a [technical foul](#), Boeheim was ejected from the game, and Duke went on to win the game easily (66 to 60). Even though Jim knew the consequences of his outburst, he was unable to control his rage and reacted in a way that was not at all helpful to his objectives. That shows low EI, right? Not so fast.

This is a prime example of "hijack behavior," where the emotional reaction simply overpowers the ability to perform logic. Does this mean Boeheim always has low Emotional Intelligence? I think not, and if you had him do a self evaluation of his EI, he would probably score pretty high most of the time, even though in that instance in front of thousands of witnesses he displayed amazingly low self control. Reason: ***In his mind the reaction was justified*** based on the importance of the game, the nature of the call, and all of the other emotions within him. If it was not justified to him, he would not have done it. If there was a better course of action, he would have done that rather than throw away any chance to win and look like a raving idiot to thousands of fans.

Jim Boeheim could have benefitted by some prior training in EI, so he would have had a split second to let the emotional reaction be tempered by the consequences of lashing out as he did. To do that, Jim should have practiced the art of moving information across his corpus callosum much faster. If he did, Syracuse might have won the game.

After reading ***Emotional Intelligence 2.0***, my awareness of my own emotions has been heightened dramatically. I can almost feel the ZAP of thoughts going from the emotional side of my brain to the rational side. Oops, there goes one now!

Given that roughly 60% of performance is a function of Emotional Intelligence, we now have an easy and almost-free mechanism to improve our interpersonal skills. I hope you will go out and purchase this little book, particularly if you are a supervisor. For leaders at all levels, EI is the most consistent way to improve performance and be more successful.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

*Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals* (2003), 2. *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online* (2006), 3. *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind* (2009), and 4. *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change* (2014). In addition, he has authored over 500 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763***