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Emotional intelligence at work

How to apply your EI
with colleagues, clients
and suppliers

by Peter Taylor

As recently as April 2009, at one of our You Asked for It workshops, *Summit* readers experienced a hands on demonstration of emotional intelligence (EI) at work. In a session led by Linda Pickard, workshop attendees figured out whether they were left or right brain dominant, or somewhere in between, and then learned how that characteristic played out in communications and negotiations with co-workers, clients and suppliers. Understanding your emotions and those of the people you are dealing with improves communication and, consequently, the outcome of the situation. I suspect that to many of you it sounds a bit “touchy feely” for a procurement magazine, but I also suspect that understanding and practicing your EI will go a long way to making work more productive, procurements more successful and contract management easier.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE is the ability to perceive one’s emotions and to effectively manage one’s behaviours in emotionally charged situations. It is also the ability to factor in the emotions of others as one interacts with them.

Summit magazine introduced readers to the field of emotional intelligence in the September and October 2006 issues. In this article I will provide tips and techniques for applying emotional intelligence to various scenarios.

People with emotional intelligence realize that while they judge themselves by their **intentions**, others will always judge them by their **impact**.

A brief introduction to the science behind emotional intelligence explains a number of important things. The human brain's first role was to protect us from external threats. The 'flight or fight' response prompted us to react quickly to sounds and sights around us. There was no time for rational thought and the weighing of options. As the brain developed further, the neo-cortex, or front of the brain, became the site of the thinking mind. The sequence of development is significant.

The "Law of Hardwiring" states that humans feel before they think. This explains why when people feel threatened they experience a flood of emotions and literally lose the capacity to think complex thoughts. Strong emotional responses, or hijacks, increase the likelihood of errors in judgement and often result in behaviours that, unless managed effectively, can damage relationships.

Self-awareness is being aware of our emotions. We must be attuned to how we feel before others remark that we look upset or suggest that we calm down. We must also learn to respond to the early warning signals provided by our bodies. For example, for one individual it may be an increased heart rate while for another it may be a tightening of the chest. Research confirms that the human body reacts to external stimuli in .85 milliseconds. To be effective, we must heed that almost instant warning signal even in the absence of concrete evidence of a threat.

We must also pay attention to the **internal** conditions under which we are more likely to feel vulnerable and thus be more likely to experience strong emotional reactions. Infants react powerfully when they feel hungry, angry, lonely or tired. As adults, we

Emotional self management steps

- **Stop and remain silent**
- **Breathe deeply**
- **Strive for perspective**
- **Gather information and engage thinking process**

must identify under which of these conditions a stronger reaction be triggered.

Another important strategy is to step back and identify **external** conditions under which we react strongly. For some people, it is being blamed. For others, it is the sense that they are being manipulated. Others react strongly when someone has not followed through on their commitments. Identifying such conditions allows us to develop strategies for coping should they occur.

The second component of emotional intelligence is self-management. Building successful relationships requires that we behave in ways that do not create fear or uncertainty in others. Individuals who react loudly and/or unpredictably to events often find that people avoid them and withhold information that might trigger a strong reaction.

Emotional self-management requires using a simple technique when the early warning system goes off. The first and most important step is to stop and remain silent! The second step involves taking several deep breathes. In addition to consuming time, this puts more oxygen into our blood stream thus calming us physically and fuelling the brain. Strong reactions tend to distort one's view of reality and, in most cases, make things appear worse than they really are so, the third step is to put what is happening into perspective. By stopping briefly, one can establish a clearer picture of the real situation.

The final step is to gather more information about the situation and attempt to engage the


rational thinking mind that essentially shut down when the hijack began.

Successful professionals in public sector procurement behave in an emotionally intelligent manner. In addition to being self-aware and managing their reactions to strong emotions, they demonstrate empathy to those they encounter, express appreciation for jobs well done and only engage in courageous conversations when they are prepared. The balance of this article will provide techniques for these three activities.

Building productive and lasting relationships requires empathy. The 3Ls approach is an effective means of demonstrating empathy. The first L involves Listening to the concerns of the person experiencing strong emotions. The active listening technique of expressing in one's own words what one believes the other person has said gives evidence of understanding his/her point or highlights the need for clarification.

In times of pressure or stress, one's inclination is often to quickly provide a solution to the matter at hand. Thus the third L is to Look for solutions. Unfortunately, this action although taken with good intentions, results in the recipient feeling dismissed. It is also prescriptive, as the listener offers the solution.

A demonstration of empathy requires the second L, Labelling. This involves verbalizing one's impression of the person's emotional state through a comment such as "you sound upset" or "my impression is that you are angry about this." The intent of such labelling is to let the person know that you are aware of his/her feelings at that moment. Having expressed one's observation, silence is the best strategy until the other person acknowledges your observation. The labelling is what makes the human connection that results in the building of a solid relationship.



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Leadership guru Ken Blanchard has long advocated 'catching people doing things right.' The expression of genuine appreciation will have an effect on the other person because what emanates from the heart really does penetrate the heart of the other person. People remember appreciation and tend to be more open to those who practice it. This is critical if one wants to build long term relationships.

The final technique is being willing to engage in courageous conversations. These are the conversations that are often avoided in the hope that the other person will self correct or for fear that the other person will

get upset or because s/he thinks and/or speaks more skillfully.

The **DESC Formula** involves developing a carefully thought out plan to capture the other person's attention, clarify the concern, outline the remedial action required and highlight the consequences of supporting or ignoring the request.

The first step involves gathering facts to clearly **D**escribe the concern to the other person. This requires preparing sentences which begin with such phrases as *When you ... When I ... When ...* In this manner you will be able to quickly describe the situation that you wish to address with the person. It is important to avoid sentences that blame or attack the other person. The intent is to create an environment in which the other person pays attention and becomes open to hearing your concern.

The second step involves **E**xplaining why this matter is important. Too often, other people, preoccupied with their own situations, fail to recognize how important certain things are to others. In this step, create sentences that begin with *I feel ... I feel as if ... I get the impression that ...* This is not a time to hold back. If you are feeling hurt, say so. If you are disappointed, say so. If you are annoyed or angry, describe those feelings. The objective here is to stress the seriousness of your concern. A courageous conversation requires honesty about your feelings.

In the third step, **S**pecify what behaviours you would like the other person to demonstrate in the future. In this step, prepare sentences such as *I would prefer ... In the future, I would like ... In the future, I do not want ...*

In the fourth step, clarify the **C**onsequences if the requested changes take place or if they fail to occur. For example, state that if the other person treats you in a respectful

manner in meetings with suppliers you will feel that your contribution is valued. If s/he does not act that way, you are prepared to leave the negotiation. Prepare sentences beginning with such phrases as *If you do ... I will ...* or *If you do not ... I will ...* The intent of this step is to point out the consequences of his/her action or inaction.

The DESC Formula will equip you to enter courageous conversations feeling confident of your ability to get your point across clearly. In addition, you will find that your request is more likely to be taken seriously.

The final step will help you manage your emotions should your worst case scenario occur. Focus your thoughts on how you think the other person *might* react to your points. Will she/he be receptive to your concern? Will she/he be open to discussing it? Will she/he be annoyed? Angry? Sad? Will she/he try to ignore you? Will she/he endeavour to brush you off?

For each of your anticipated reactions, decide how you will react. What will you do if the other person loses his/her composure? Will you leave the meeting? What will you do if she/he yells? Cries? Stops talking? Is not listening? By preparing yourself for possible disruptive behaviours by the other person, you will significantly reduce the likelihood of your experiencing an emotional hijack.


DESC Formula

- **Describe** – gather facts and use words that do not blame or attack the other person
- **Explain** – show the importance of the issue to you
- **Specify** – be clear on what you would like to see demonstrated in the future
- **Consequences** – clearly outline what will happen if the requested actions do not occur

By planning for courageous conversations, you will enter them feeling more confident. Take your notes to the meeting. In addition to helping you control your actions, they will increase your chances of being taken seriously. By stating that you have made notes in preparation for the meeting, you may catch the other person's attention and lead to your concern being taken more seriously.

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Your preparation for the courageous conversation will help you make your points more emphatically. You will also find that the examination of possible worst case scenarios will result in the actual meeting being almost anticlimactic. You will have already been there mentally.

All of these techniques have application in negotiations and supplier development. They are also essential in leadership and coaching. People respond much better to those who treat them with honesty, respect and civility. 

Peter Taylor is the principal of Peter Taylor & Associates Inc., based in Oshawa, Ontario. www.pstaylor.com

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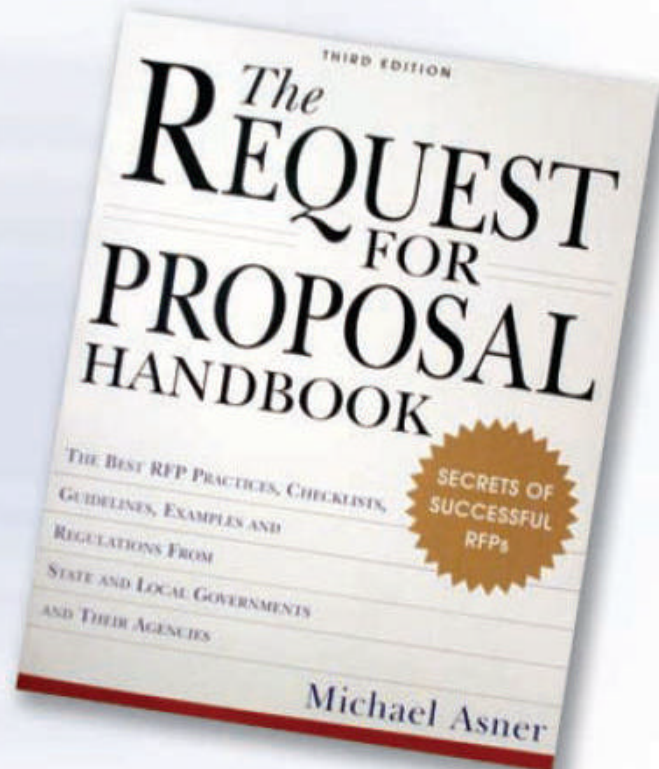
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