



The Emotional Intelligence Difference: Coaching for Behavior Change

We've all known competent, highly intelligent individuals who were promoted into leadership roles only to fail miserably. We've also seen the opposite—individuals with average intellect and technical skills who assumed leader positions and enjoyed extraordinary success. The difference, research indicates, is emotional intelligence (EI).

EI coaching can inspire leaders to positively influence their teams and impact their organizations

From a business perspective, this is a highly compelling reason for organizations everywhere to educate their up-and-coming leaders, as well as their existing ones, in the science and practice of emotional intelligence. And the good news is emotional intelligence can be taught and learned quite effectively.

Daniel Goleman's 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*,¹ launched an era of exploration regarding how emotions impact our behavior. Backed by dozens of research studies, the efficacy of applying emotional intelligence is correlated with valuable outcomes for business. Most telling is that organizations led by individuals with emotional intelligence are more likely to have lower turnover, higher than average customer loyalty, above-average productivity, and higher profitability.² With nearly three quarters of the workforce now disengaged from their jobs (Gallup),

emotional intelligence coaching can inspire leaders to change their personal behaviors in ways that positively influence their teams and impact their organizations.

Amy Agallar is the Director of Global Treasury Operations at Modine Manufacturing Company, a position that she was promoted into after participating in emotional intelligence coaching. She says of her coaching:

“Getting an undergraduate degree or an MBA can teach business skills; however, it does not teach how to be aware of yourself and how you react to others... The overall (coaching) engagement truly strengthened my commitment to my team and the company I work for.”

Emotional intelligence enhances foundational leadership skills regardless of how an organization defines the essential competencies they seek to develop. Coaching and education related to the following critical elements will positively impact the EI of an organization’s leaders:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Feedback
3. Workplace Culture

1. Self-Awareness

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Self-awareness is the beginning point for developing emotional intelligence. Before leaders can correct their own problematic behaviors, they must first recognize which ones are counterproductive and/or not being well received by their teams. In some cases, the behaviors that served individuals well early in their careers actually undermine their effectiveness once they’ve attained leadership roles. In his book, *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*, Marshall Goldsmith states that faulty behaviors are not necessarily grounded in skill, intelligence or personality: “They are transactional flaws performed by one person against others.”³ In other words, faulty behaviors emerge from emotional intelligence deficits.

Understanding and identifying situations that create what Goleman refers to as *emotional hijacking*—when one’s reason is overpowered by emotion—is critical to increasing self-awareness. Even experienced leaders don’t manage themselves well once their fight-or-flight response is activated. Mary Jo McDougall, an executive leader coach at Empathia, encourages clients to keep track of people, places and things that stir visceral responses and cause their emotions to overcome them. “With this new awareness comes an opportunity to prepare for situations where you may be emotionally hijacked,” she says. “Strategies as simple as deep breathing can give the rational brain time to take control.”

Rick Meier is Vice President, Materials Management, at ProHealth Care and understands the benefits of knowing when his hot buttons are getting pushed and how coaching has provided him with the tools to help reign in his reaction:

“You see it faster. Because you’ve been through it you know what the signs are when you get hijacked or when somebody pushes your buttons or when you launch into your old behavior. You recognize it... You recognize the signs.”

Even if you have good self-management skills, you need to understand how your feelings affect your composure

“Only 10 percent of our communication is verbal,” observes McDougall. “The rest is made up of nonverbal and paraverbal cues. So, even if you have good self-management skills, you need to understand how your feelings affect your composure. Whatever you feel is telegraphed in your facial expressions, eye contact and gestures. For leaders, that means your peers and your teams can easily ‘read between the lines’ based on your tone, pitch and the pacing of your speech.”

For example, if a leader’s self-talk (inner thoughts and dialogue) about a colleague or a direct report is negative, that negativity will probably come through loud and clear in her/his speech, mannerisms and nonverbal cues. Working to identify hot button issues helps leaders positively manage their self-talk and their emotional responses.

One Empathia client, a director level leader, understood that he was routinely frustrated by his direct reports’ questions because he immediately knew the answers. His self-talk was, “I can’t believe you don’t know that!” And he would jump in with the answers. After coaching, he was able to see that people were interpreting his behavior as an indictment of their intelligence. The nonverbal and paraverbal message was, “I can’t believe you’re that stupid,” which resulted in direct reports who were reluctant to ask questions, feared making mistakes, and had low morale. By recognizing the impact of his unintended message on his staff, he was motivated to change his negative self-talk and behavior. After coaching, his self-talk became, “Here is an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills with my reports.” He slowed down, listened, and asked powerful questions to stimulate thinking. As a result, real mentoring began to occur with his team and relationship management improved.

After experiencing his own coaching, Meier describes the benefit of being aware of self-talk:

“I can be feeling impatient and when I recognize it, I can try the self-talk. It doesn’t always work, but when it does, it’s nice.”

McDougall states, “As coaches, we work with clients to grow self-awareness and self-management. Once they understand the EI paradigm, leaders are able to recognize the situations and people that present the greatest challenges. Coaching sessions become self-directed debriefings of recent encounters or explorations of upcoming events. Leaders are able to ask, ‘How could I have shown better EI in that situation?’ Or they can learn to

anticipate emotional hijacking situations and ask, ‘What can I do to avoid a negative response?’”

2. Feedback

A feedback loop (permitting and encouraging honest feedback from colleagues and direct reports) is also important for leaders who want to determine whether their behavior is having the desired impact on others. Toward the conclusion of the coaching engagement, deciding who will be in the feedback loop is critical for sustaining and growing new behaviors.

When asked how the practice of emotional intelligence has impacted his leadership, Meier reflects:

“(It has) given me the confidence to go to the people who report to me ... and I’ve given people permission to give me feedback ... honest feedback... That’s been huge. And I reinforce that at every meeting. In my mind the number one thing ... is to let people know they have permission to call me on when I forget my emotional intelligence.”

Also important is learning how to apply emotional intelligence during difficult conversations. For instance, how do you give emotionally intelligent performance reviews? How do you talk to your boss about a subject that creates some fear within you? How do you address a sensitive issue with peers without damaging your working relationship?

Effectively addressing conflict is a key leadership attribute and most of us don’t do it very well. A 2010 study by the authors of *Crucial Conversations* found that employees waste an average of \$1,500 plus an additional eight hours of time for every difficult conversation they avoid. People who know how to discuss contentious issues are not as prone to complaining, feeling victimized, doing work-arounds and getting angry.⁴

3. Workplace Culture

No amount of coaching for emotional intelligence can transform a workplace culture if the leaders at the top aren’t committed to that transformation. Top leadership must take *personal* action to create and support an environment in which emotional intelligence is fostered, competence in managing self and others is taught, and people are held accountable for their behaviors and how they are perceived by others. When individuals are sent back into toxic cultures, even after they’ve been coached, the outlook is not good—particularly if they report to superiors whose self-awareness and self-management need improvement.

According to McDougall, “We’ve known for a long time that the leader’s mood affects the team. In most workplaces everybody reads the boss’s affect and knows if it’s a bad

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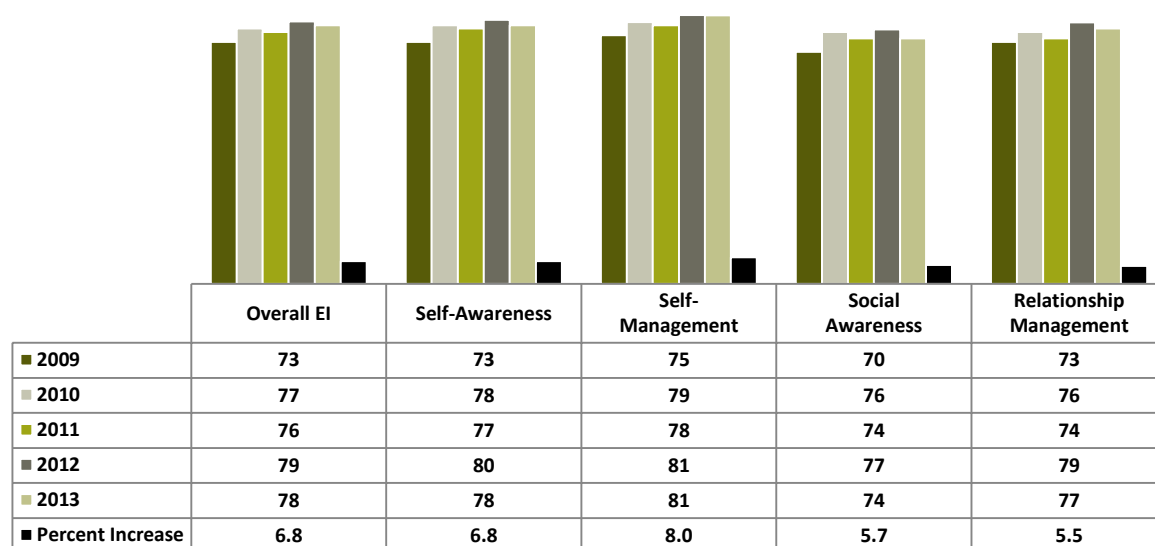
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day.” In *The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence*, Joshua Freedman cites numerous studies showing that leaders spread feelings that influence the mood of a team and thus its performance.⁵

Working with a Fortune 500 company’s executive leadership development program since 2006, Empathia has been able to measure the impact of emotional intelligence on the client’s workplace culture. During its annual meeting, the Chairman of the Board highlighted emotional intelligence as a fundamental leadership attribute the company values. This was a significant turning point, especially in an organization where angry outbursts were once acceptable. Afterward, Empathia tracked the emotional intelligence appraisal scores for the incoming program participants and found a 6.8 percent increase in their overall emotional intelligence ratings.

As the chart below outlines, the area of greatest improvement was in self-management, which showed an eight percent increase overall.

Emotional Intelligence Appraisals – Average Class Scores



Score	Meaning
90-100	A strength to capitalize on
80-89	A strength to build on
70-79	With some improvement, this could be a strength
60-69	Something you should work on
59 and below	A concern you must address

This improvement suggests that the company’s leaders are increasingly being educated in the concept of emotional intelligence and that its culture is shifting toward holding leaders accountable for improving awareness and management of their feelings.

According to Philip Chard, President & CEO of Empathia and a seasoned executive leader coach, the results at this particular organization have been dramatic. “In a workplace culture where, not long ago, the idea of emotional intelligence was either unknown or discounted, it is now at the foundation of leadership development,” he says. “Emotional intelligence has become the company’s modus operandi for managing talent, expediting employee and customer relations, and the overall organizational strategy for business success.”

Examples

Post-coaching scores suggest that leaders are learning to master the skill of understanding emotions and choosing how to react to them

Empathia has documented improvement in emotional intelligence scores through its online coaching model and its 12-session telephonic coaching model. Based on the appraisal from *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Bradberry and Greaves, post-coaching scores improved by 12 percent for clients utilizing the online model and 21 percent for clients using the telephonic coaching model. This suggests that clients have an improved understanding of emotional intelligence concepts and an increased confidence in practicing modified behavior. Interestingly, the greatest increase was in the area of self-management—25.6 percent for telephonic coaching and 12.9 percent for online coaching. Because self-management requires good self-awareness, the data suggest that leaders are learning to master the skill of understanding emotions and choosing how to react to them. As Bradberry and Greaves explain:

“Since we’re hard-wired to experience emotions before we respond to them, it’s the one-two punch of reading emotions effectively and then reacting to them that sets the best self-managers apart. A high level of self-management ensures you aren’t getting in your own way and doing things that limit your success.”⁶

In short-term coaching, the goal is to shift one or perhaps two behaviors. “Our experience has shown that once leaders practice good self-awareness and self-management, there is a ripple affect,” notes McDougall. “They begin to see improvements in their social awareness and relationship management that, in turn, result in greater overall life satisfaction.”

Modine Manufacturing’s Agallar attests to this:

“A few people have stated that I seem so much happier now than I did prior to the coaching engagement. I think this really sums it up. Before I was so bogged down not knowing how to deal with everything and not having the skills; however, now with some of those skills I am able to cope better and the stress is much less, which results in being more satisfied and happy.”

Increased EI also has a far-reaching impact, as ProHealth Care’s Meier describes:

“It’s not only helped me at work but at home too. You don’t harbor these grudges... (EI coaching) forces you to deal with it. People recognize that and respond to it.”

With so many benefits linked to improved emotional intelligence, it’s only a matter of time before this becomes a high priority for any organization that values cultivating talent and creating a performance-driven culture. ⑤

Emotional intelligence has the best chance of taking hold in a culture when senior leaders embrace and model the behaviors

Why coaching for emotional intelligence should have a place in your organization:

- Emotional intelligence impacts your bottom line through higher worker engagement, less time wasted avoiding conflicts, and greater work/life satisfaction.
- Attention to the development of emotional intelligence in leaders starts with better self-awareness and self-management. Increased management of oneself contributes to greater success in managing others.
- Knowing what triggers one’s emotional hijacking creates opportunities to strategize and practice new approaches.
- Creating feedback loops promotes continuous EI improvement.
- Emotional intelligence has the best chance of taking hold in a culture when senior leaders embrace and model the behaviors.
- Small improvements in leader behavior can significantly improve the work environment.
- Modeling emotionally intelligent behaviors creates mentoring opportunities.

Empathia provides behavioral health solutions that improve the well-being, safety and productivity of organizations and individuals. The company collaborates with private and public sector entities from expansive Fortune 500 corporations to small businesses in addressing a diverse range of needs: employee assistance, disaster response and planning, workforce well-being, employee relations, leadership development, training and benefits support. Founded in 1982 under the name NEAS, Empathia has distinguished itself as a quality leader dedicated to creating a superior customer experience for both client organizations and employees. For more information, visit www.empathia.com.

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