



The Importance of Emotional Intelligence for Lawyers in the Workplace

Skills and Professional Development



Most of us have worked with someone who is technically brilliant at their job, an expert in their field, yet lacks the fundamental basics of effective communication and people skills, which means they really aren't that nice to work with. What they are lacking is emotional intelligence to support their IQ.

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence (EI) and its concepts were first spoken about as early as the 1930s. It was coined as a term in 1990 by Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Daniel Goleman's 1995 book, [Emotional Intelligence](#), heightened the popularity of the term, provoking conversations around whether it can matter more than IQ.

EI is all about understanding what makes you and those around you tick. It's about understanding and being able to control your emotional response and the impact you have on those around you.

There are five key factors to EI:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Motivation
4. Social skills (e.g., communication)
5. Empathy (e.g., people/leadership skills)

Is this another buzzword?

EI is often mistaken for being a soft “wrap each other in cotton wool” and “shower each other with positive affirmation” reference, and this is certainly not realistic. While there is a large aspect that works with the power of the mind and challenging our mindset to leverage the chemical reactions, it is not about wishing for money and prosperity and having the wishes come true.

EI can be extremely challenging and thought-provoking. It has been described by many as confronting, as we peel back the workings of our thoughts and the impact they have on us and the people around us.

Why is it relevant for lawyers?

When lawyers are working with corporations/organizations, providing advice on substantial current or future risk, the level of EI will influence the relationship and the ultimate outcome. For corporate lawyers, there is a high level of trust that is required, with the senior levels of the organizations relying on lawyers to provide security and safety measures of the highest standard in preparation for the worst-case scenario.

We know that in situations like these, the effectiveness of the communication, empathy, and leadership skills that the lawyer has will determine the outcome and level of success. Before we can truly develop any of these skills, we first need to be self-aware and able to regulate our emotional responses, ensuring the emotion and the severity in play is appropriate for the situation.



Developing emotional intelligence

Developing our EI is not a quick, overnight fix, nor can we attend a workshop and walk out emotionally intelligent. This is a slow build and can only be done if we genuinely want to develop it. Without the desire to grow our EI, there is not a tool or reference material that can assist.

Here are three tips for developing EI.

1. Power of the pause

It is natural human behavior to fill silence with talking. We've been encouraged to talk since we were born. For this reason, ask questions of others rather than making statements and then take the time to just pause. Allow the other person to fill that silence with words.

The longer we pause, the deeper they go into their subconscious minds and the more we learn. Many times, the other person tends to solve their own problems and also learns a lot about themselves by unleashing the thoughts in their subconscious mind.

2. Disrupt an emotional hijack

Emotional hijacking is a reaction that occurs in our mind when our thalamus sends a signal to our amygdala before analyzing the information in the neocortex. Usually, certain situations or words trigger an emotional response and we start reacting before we understand the situation.

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Information is key here; provide more information, allowing time for the recipient to process the information and react appropriately. Be careful not to let the emotional response of others also trigger an emotional response in you.

3. Empathy

Empathy is one of the most admired skills for individuals and organizations. It is different from sympathy. With empathy, we don't need to know what occurred to be able to relate to the situation or even agree with the emotional response. We simply need to recognize and recall the emotion that the other person is feeling, including the severity.

For example, when was the last time you felt that angry? At that time, what were the worst and best things that someone could say or do? Our minds default with a quick response that is usually the last thing that the person wants to hear. Empathy takes disrupting our mindset to pause and respond the best way based on the emotion on display to resolve the situation.

Final thoughts

Technical skills and IQ will only take us so far before great EI is required to master the delivery of these skills and effectively work with people. Equally, EI will only take us so far before technical/IQ is required to deliver.

It is a common occurrence that IQ will get us hired, yet it is our EI skills that get us promoted. It's not what we know, it's how and why we do it.

This article is a part of *ACC Docket's* June 2020 Asian Briefings. Read the other features on [economic substance laws](#) and [ethics as in-house counsel](#).

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