

Success in today's workplace requires supervisors and employees alike to be flexible and able to manage change effectively. A necessary part of being adaptable is the ability to interact with people productively, that is, in ways which get things done and maintain a positive environment. An essential component of this ability is described as "Emotional Intelligence".

This is the last of a three-part series in which The Successful Supervisor is providing information and tips on being emotionally intelligent at work. The ideas are adapted from the book Primal Leadership by Dr. Richard Boyatzis and "Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace", a workshop developed by Cliff Cohen, EAP Clinical Director. Each issue has addressed the situation below.

We are interested in your feedback. Email your questions and comments to the EAP at askeap@eapsolutions.com

"I've been a supervisor for years. My staff works hard and usually meets their goals, but there are times when things don't go well. I'm getting feedback that I'm frustrated a lot and it's having an impact. The group is pretty negative. I'm just human like everyone else. What's the big deal?"

This situation is one supervisors and employees alike can identify with. Frustration is human, so is it a "big deal"? Through the lens of Emotional Intelligence, the answer is that it sure can be. The fact that humans are emotional beings means that managing emotions becomes a necessary part of human interaction. And, as we see in the situation above, when emotions spill over at work, there are consequences. The good news is that Emotional Intelligence can be learned.

The July issue described Emotional Intelligence as including the ability to:

- Accurately perceive, appraise and express emotions, including anger
- Understand emotions and what they tell us
- Delay immediate gratification
- Have resilience to cope with high levels of stress and
- Correctly judge when and with whom to share personal thoughts (Cliff Cohen workshop).

Four key ability clusters, identified by Dr. Boyatzis, provide the skill sets needed to manage highly charged emotional situations and achieve desired outcomes. They were presented in the last two issues and include:

1. *Self Awareness Cluster:* Recognizing emotions & impact
2. *Self-Management Cluster:* Inhibiting acting on emotions as well as developing flexibility
3. *Social Competencies Cluster:* How to handle relationships, social awareness and social skills and
4. *Relationship Management Cluster:* Related to leadership and influencing others

So how do we apply this information to dealing with the situation above in an Emotionally Intelligent way? Start with the supervisor.

- Begin with a focus on Emotional Self Awareness. Asking the basic question "Is showing my frustration useful?" allows the supervisor to gather information about

managing emotions objectively rather than operating on emotional automatic pilot (reacting without thinking).

- This can be followed by paying attention to one's own "self talk". Is your self talk negative, such as "Work is completely unreasonable...no wonder I'm frustrated"? Or, is it more realistic, e.g., "These new expectations are challenging...I guess I have to make some changes"? What we tell ourselves literally sets us up to act in a particular way.
- Once the supervisor is beginning to get a handle on the frustration and using more realistic self talk, paying attention to setting the tone at work is important. Becoming aware of the needs of staff and recognizing how the supervisor influences staff are important aspects of Emotional Intelligence. Presenting and maintaining a positive attitude, listening to staff, creating a supportive environment by keeping a sense of humor and offering "nice job" or "thanks" are behaviors this supervisor can use to practice E. I. and improve interactions with staff.
- Self examination regarding stress management is another step in this process. Operating with E.I. involves developing resilience in dealing with stress. Like an automobile, the supervisor cannot operate on an "empty tank". It is essential to find activities, personal support and time to deal with stress to avoid "running out of gas" (emotional energy). Pay attention to stress at work for self and staff as well; find ways to address and reduce it where possible.
- Consciously attending to relationship-building is a must. Acknowledging and accepting diversity in approach, problem solving methods and communication styles among staff and others you relate to demonstrates personal flexibility. Being flexible means one avoids a "one size fits all" approach and enables the supervisor to be empathic, hear what is important, find ways to involve others in creating solutions, and learn how to positively influence others.

Developing Emotional Intelligence is a process. It begins with the simple recognition that emotions are important and need to be managed in yourself and in response to others. The EAP is available for support. Call us.