Top 10 Tips

Emotional Intelligence

What is Emotional Intelligence (EI)? It is EI that allows us to express preferences in decision-making, pursue a goal passionately, control our anger, and offer persuasive arguments for or against an idea. EI explains why we like certain people more than others, and helps us get along with the ones we don't. It is EI that helps establish productive working relationships and become politically aware and astute in the organisation we work, and it is what keeps us going in difficult times preventing pressure from tipping over into stress. If you think any organisation in the public or private sector is or should be based only on rational skills, the latest research would urge you to rethink this notion: Having emotional intelligence, or people skills, is the most fundamental dimension of leadership today and the higher we aspire to or rise in leadership positions, the more important it becomes.

How can I develop my level of Emotional Intelligence in the most effective way?

1. **Believe it can make a difference:**

   There is growing evidence that the range of abilities that constitutes what is now commonly known as emotional intelligence plays a key role in determining success both in life and in the workplace. People have different levels of knowledge, skills and behaviour underpinned by a variety of values, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions. This makes for a very complex link between what people do in a leadership role and the effectiveness on levels of performance both at an organisational and individual level. There is however a large body of evidence* both research based and anecdotal that supports the idea that “people skills” rather than just intellect or technical ability play an important role in differentiating the average from the exceptional performance as a leader. The rational part of our brain gives us information about people and things, yet preferences and why we have them are based on the limbic brain's storage of emotions. Without access to that information, we are unable to make even the simplest of decisions because all choices would be equal. Emotions are always present in our lives, whether we recognise them or not. Those that do recognise the importance of emotions and can both understand and control them tend to be more successful leaders *Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, North Carolina. Plus http://www.eiconsortium.org/

2. **Be self aware:**

   Self-awareness is important in leadership development and is a key skill in handling pressure in order to prevent it from becoming stress. The more accurately you can identify and monitor your emotional reactions and the impact of those reactions, the faster you can recover your resilience to pressure. Self awareness can be developed through self reflection and by the practice of seeking feedback. Ask your “manager” and other staff who know you well for honest constructive feedback on how your behaviour is impacting them. SRDS is a good opportunity for doing this. Feedback does not have to use a formal process like SRDS or 360 feedback; you can also take some time to reflect after meetings or conversations with others. Reflect not just on the outcome of the meeting but on your behaviour, language, body language, emotional reactions to events etc. Would you do the same again?
Gibbs* identified a series of 6 steps to aid reflective practice, these elements make up a cycle that can be applied over and over again.

Description - What happened?  
Feelings - What were you thinking and feeling?  
Evaluation - What was good and bad about the experience?  
Analysis - What sense can you make of the situation?  
Conclusion - What else could you have done?  
Action plan - What will you do next time?


A key part of developing self awareness is accurate self assessment: For Daniel Goleman*, an influential writer on the subject of emotional intelligence, there are four key components of accurate self assessment:

- Aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- Reflective and learning from experience
- Open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning, and self-development
- Able to show a sense of humour and perspective about themselves


3. **Be an engaging Leader.**

There are various styles of leadership that you can adopt and you will need to use the right style in the right situation. The most positive and effective style in the opinions of those being lead is often characterised as a “participative” style. The essence of this is that leaders who are perceived as being skilled at listening to others and gaining their input before implementing any change are likely also to see themselves as more satisfied with life and good at cooperating, fostering relationships, controlling impulses, and understanding their own and others’ emotions. Whilst being honest try not to dwell on the negative side of things. Optimists can still be realists rather than becoming pessimists! The skill to develop and maintain to be an engaging leader is “active listening”

Here are some tips that you can use to become an engaging leader:

- Focus on the positive of situations and people, even when it’s difficult.
- Look toward solutions, rather than problems.
- Tell people about their strengths and what they do well
- Focus on your successes, not your failures.
- Treat failures as lessons that you can use to increase self-understanding and improve future performance.

http://www.cipd.co.uk/shapingthefuture/_leadershipreport.htm Research by Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalf on being an engaging leader for CIPD
4. **Be an Active Listener.**

- **Ask Open questions:** Rather than asking questions which only require a yes or no answer try and ask open questions. For example, instead of saying: 'has this been going on a long time?' ask 'How long has this been going on?'. That way, instead of closing the conversation down into a yes or no response, you open it out and encourage the other person to keep talking. Another good example to remember is instead of saying “is everything ok?” you can ask “how are things going?”

- **Summarising:** This helps to show that you've listened to, and understood, what's been said. For example, 'So you're feeling very stressed by the restructure, but you still like doing your job.'

- **Reflecting:** Repeating back a word or phrase can encourage people to go on. If someone says, 'So it's been really difficult recently,' you can keep the conversation going simply by repeating 'you say difficult…Tell me more about that- difficult in what way?'

- **Clarifying:** We can skirt around or gloss over the most difficult things. If we can avoid saying them, we will. If the person you're speaking with glosses over an important point, saying 'Tell me more about…', or '…that sounds a difficult area for you' can help them clarify the points, not only for you, but for themselves. It sounds obvious, but a 'Yes', 'Go on', or 'I see' can really give some much needed encouragement. Give people time to respond as emotionally charge situations can increase or decrease the normal pace at which people speak.

- **Reacting:** You don't have to be completely neutral. If whoever you're talking with has been having an absolutely dreadful time of it, some sympathy and understanding is vital. 'That must have been difficult', 'You've had an awful time' – this can really help.

- **Look like your listening:** lean forward, nod, use open body language, mirror the body language of the other person (not copy exactly!) and maintain eye contact.

- **It’s about them not you:** Say nothing. Be quiet and let the other person talk. Let them say what they want to say. When you are listening, *most of the words should be theirs, not yours.* Allow enough time to let the person speak, without jumping right in with your own comments the minute they take a breath.

5. **Be Assertive:**

Assertiveness is the ability to maintain our boundaries and express our needs clearly and directly. It includes being able to express emotions that we are feeling and offer opinions that may be unpopular or run counter to the “the way we do things around here.” Although being assertive means asking for what we want, it does not mean we always get what we ask for. Assertiveness is often confused with aggression. Aggression, either direct or passive, puts your rights above those of other people.

- **Pay attention to the language you use.** Work toward cutting out long pauses, “ahs,” and “ums.” These words are fillers and can make you sound indecisive. Understand what fillers you use by habit and try and break that habit. If you are not sure ask other people! Slow down your rate of speaking if you have to, but practice making your words sound firm and strong and believe what you say as well as say what you believe.

- **Practice asking for what you want.** Don’t ask for permission or excuse yourself, just ask directly. Tell yourself that your time and opinions are as valuable as anyone else’s. Even if you don’t really believe it at that point, or previous experience tells you different. Work up the courage and do it and practice in front of a mirror if it helps get the words, tone
of voice and body language right. Ask people directly at least once per day. Start with situations less intimidating and work toward the more difficult ones.

- **Use appropriate body language.** Look people in the eye when talking to them but don’t stare. Stand firm but relaxed and don’t shuffle around. Use open gestures e.g. palms out rather than palms in. don’t use pointing fingers as it can look aggressive or use folded arms as it can look defensive.

- **Make it a habit to speak up and say something when you find something wrong with a purchase you have made, whether it is a meal in a restaurant, an item of clothing, or a car repair.** You do not have to be rude just say factually or express your opinion on what is wrong- “This is cold or this is not what I expected” etc. Being assertive is not suffering in silence or saying what you wished you said at the time later on to another person to get things off your chest!

- **Don’t let specialists intimidate you into not asking for clarification or explanation because you think they will see you as stupid.** It is up to them to simplify things so that you understand, not up to you to learn their technical expertise. Keep asking for explanations until you are comfortable and fully understand what they are saying. “I am sorry but can you rephrase that so that I know exactly what you mean”

- **Never speak up for yourself when you are feeling out of control, or anger will be clearly audible in your voice.** When you do this, you give the other person control over you. Wait until you can speak calmly and firmly. If necessary take a break to regain composure (I just need to pop to the loo!) Remember, you are not attacking the other person, you are simply asking for what you want. If you don’t get it, move on and try again. Focus on the fact that you were not afraid to try and did your best not on the outcome.

6. **Be nice to other people:**

Use your positive emotions to influence positive emotions in other people. This does not always mean being nice and forgiving to those who are treating us poorly and allowing them to dump their negative energy on us. You can choose to view their negativity as a reflection of themselves rather than you and be assertive, allowing you to use your self-respect and self-care to ward off any negative emotions and feel a positive rather than negative emotion about yourself. Remember: that behaviour breeds behaviour. There is some evidence to support this saying. At Oxford University, professor of mathematics Martin Nowak looked at this issue scientifically. He and his colleagues found that doing a good turn for a stranger today increases the chances that someone will do a good turn for you in the future. Create a virtuous circle rather than a downward spiral.

7. **Keep a learning log:**

For 10 minutes each morning or each evening, write whatever you want. Do not get out your laptop or, sit at your desktop! The pen and the paper are essential, and though it is a slower process, you’ll get more benefit from doing it this way because you will be more intimately connected with your words. Writing a personal learning log or reflective journal can be totally open-ended with no specific plan, or built around a theme. The meaning in your writing will not be evident until you have entered your thoughts faithfully for two or more weeks and you can look back over all you have written. The content does not have to be profound, but the physical act of writing is linked to memory — particularly emotional memory. Do not try to organise your writing: let the words flow in a stream of consciousness way. Resolve to continue this for at least six months. You will be surprised how this process can help you connect with your emotions and the part they play in making your life “good” or “bad” This deeper level of self awareness will not only impact on you but on how you relate to other people.
8. **Discharge your emotions harmlessly:**

A technique that Abraham Lincoln reportedly practiced was to write letters he did not plan to send. The idea is that through expressing your emotions in writing, you are able to release any emotional charge. Write e-mails but do not send them immediately, save as draft and re-read after several hours. You can then amend or delete if you feel that the language or tone is not going to make the right impact. “Ready, aim, fire” replaces “ready, fire, aim”!

Use a mentor or a coach to act as a sounding board to help you manage your emotions effectively. Run through potentially emotionally charged conversations with a third party to test out how the message is received in a risk free way.

You can use physical activity to release your emotions as part of playing a game in an instant, or use a more sedate hobby to unwind and relax and let the emotions discharge more gradually. Everyone needs some me time—make sure you get yours.

9. **Build effective relationships with others:**

Bring back tea and coffee breaks when you can gather both informally and socially. Talking about work, life and love can build bonds that are difficult to establish at more formal team or committee meetings. Try not to eat alone at your desk every day. Try to change your existing habits by designating one day a week to go out to lunch or have lunch with someone either in your team or who is important in helping or hindering your achievement of objectives. The golf course and the pub have been used in this way for years. However, be sensitive to doing “real” business behind the scenes or excluding people by the informal methods you use—not everyone likes the pub or golf or is available to participate due to work patterns or child care responsibilities. Also remember that gossip can poison effective relationships so talk with the person who needs to hear it or don't talk at all!

10. **Use other role models.**

Think back over the last few years and identify someone in a leadership position who was able to relate to people with personal warmth and affection while operating effectively as a leader—that is, offer constructive and effective mentoring or coaching when it was needed and make tough decisions, yet still manage to maintain close relationships with the people they led.

- List as many qualities as you can that made this person so special to work for. See if you can identify some of the things that made it possible for the person to feel close to the staff without this closeness limiting their effectiveness as a leader.

- Imagine if your team with you as the leader were asked how you rate on the characteristics you identified above. How close are you to being the kind of person you want to be? Use a scale of 1-10 for each characteristic to see how you measure up to the person you used as a role model.

- Where are you falling short of your own ideals for the kind of person you would like to be? Write down the three lowest scores.

- Identify two or three action steps that could help you make some improvements in exhibiting those qualities you have written. A magical transformation is not expected. People can learn to be more emotionally intelligent but it is not a quick fix!