

Succeeding with emotional intelligence

HAVE YOU EVER worked with someone who had great technical knowledge and skills, yet had poor ability to interact with others? While technical smarts can help you get a job, “people smarts” are what help you keep the job and progress within the organization, says Fiorella Callocchia, a Canadian management consultant who specializes in career coaching, HR consulting, and training.

In her keynote presentation at the IAAP Canada District Conference on May 29, 2003 in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Callocchia told her audience that “people smarts,” also known as emotional intelligence (EI), are as important, if not more important, than technical knowledge. She defines emotional intelligence as a key set of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that allow you to be successful in your work and your personal life.

EI measures how smart you are in dealing with people, which is distinct from IQ, a measure of cognitive ability that is often a predictor of academic success. EI is composed of a set of behaviors and attributes that can be learned. Callocchia says that these main qualities contribute to EI:

- A high level of intrapersonal skills, especially self-awareness, so you can monitor yourself and make adjustments in your approach.
- Interpersonal skills that allow you to interact effectively and develop strong relationships.
- Adaptability which includes having a keen awareness of what’s going on in the world around you, being flexible and able to solve problems.
- Stress management, including the ability to manage your emotions and stress.
- A positive, optimistic view of the world and life in general.

Here are some strategies Callocchia recommends for improving EI:

- **Set goals to meet new people and build existing relationships.** Perhaps there is someone whom you work with, but you’ve never taken the time to strike up a conversation. In addition to developing relationships with people you already know, try a new club or association to expand your network.
- **Aim for a balanced communication style.** If you tend to “under-communicate” and keep to yourself a lot, make an effort to increase the amount of communication you have with your manager and co-workers. If your frequency of contact with others is already fairly high, aim to change the quality of your interactions by asking others for their input, opinions, or advice on dealing with a problem or giving them positive feedback on some aspect of their performance. Get to know your manager’s preferences for communication and take these preferences into consideration in choosing how to keep him updated on your progress.
- **Practice the art of active listening.** In conversation, focus on what others are saying, instead of what you’re thinking about or how you would like to respond. Maintain direct eye contact, develop responsive body language, and don’t attempt to speak before others are finished talking. Use the techniques of paraphrasing or summarizing to let the speaker know you are focused on what they are saying.
- **Learn to communicate clearly and assertively.** If you tend to be hesitant about expressing yourself, work on becoming more confident and forthright in sharing your opinions, ideas, and beliefs by taking a public speaking seminar or joining a discussion group.

- **Improve your understanding of others.** Observe your manager and your colleagues and get to know their likes, dislikes, and work style. While no one is suggesting that you need to become a totally accommodating chameleon, the ability to flex with others and take their needs into consideration will help to solidify your relationships with them.
- **Manage yourself.** Despite some pressures that you may not be able to control in your daily life, there are many things you can do to diminish and manage the stress in your life. Avoid associating with people who are toxic, recommends Callocchia. These are people who look for any opportunity to complain, criticize, and generally bring you down. Align yourself with those who encourage and support you and who look for solutions rather than dwell on problems. Cultivate a positive mindset that is tempered with cautious optimism. Callocchia says that people with high EI have a realistic grasp of what’s going on in the world, along with an optimistic view that a positive future is possible. They realize they can control their “attitude” and responses.
- **Develop an accurate view of who you are.** Based on past experience, what are your strengths and developmental needs? Be honest with yourself about what is preventing you from optimizing all your potential and hidden talents. If you have trouble answering this question, ask for feedback from others who will give a constructive, objective opinion. The Emotional Intelligence Assessment Tool Callocchia offers can help to give you a clear picture of yourself and reveal any “blind spots” that may be holding you back.

For more information about the Emotional Intelligence Assessment Tool and Fiorella Callocchia’s training and consulting services, visit her web site at www.hrimpact.com.