

ARL™ News

Issue 18

The Action Reflection Learning™ Newsletter

February, 2002

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

We can be wiser

Isabel Rimanoczy

Once a man came to Zen master Bankei and confessed that he had been born with a short temper, which he found unmanageable in spite of his attempts to control it.

The Zen master said, "What an interesting thing you were born with! Do you have a short temper right now? If so, show me, and I'll cure it for you".

The man said, "I don't have it right at this moment. It comes out unexpectedly, when something happens".

The Zen master said, "In that case, your short temper is not something innate in you". (Zen Antics, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1993)

Mankind constantly generates ideas and knowledge. Now and then, a major breakthrough takes place, that changes the way we think and in consequence, how we live. 1996 was the year of Daniel Goleman's first edition of the Emotional Intelligence book, and that could certainly be considered a conceptual breakthrough. Starting from the very first page, by citing Aristotle, Goleman recognizes that the different ideas he brings together are not new ("Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy.")

But the value of Goleman's book is precisely this: how he was able to collect bits and pieces of human knowledge and wisdom over the centuries, exploring and expanding the meaning of Emotional Intelligence.

He used the definition of psychologists Salovey and Mayer (1990) and in the latest writings (2001) he brings it down to four key components:

1) **Self-awareness:** perhaps the most essential of the E.I. competencies, is the ability to read your own emotions. It allows people to know their strengths and limitations and feel confident about their self-worth. Resonant leaders use self-awareness to gauge their own moods accurately, and they intuitively know how they are affecting others.

2) **Self-management:** is the ability to control your emotions and act with honesty and integrity in reliable and adaptable ways. Resonant leaders don't let their occasional bad moods seize the day; they use self-management to leave it outside the office or to explain its source to people in a reasonable manner, so they know where it's coming from and how long it might last.

3) **Social awareness** includes the key capabilities of empathy and organizational intuition. Socially aware executives do more than sense other people's emotions, they show that they care.(...) Thus, resonant leaders often keenly understand how their words and actions make others feel, and they are sensitive enough to change them when that impact is negative.

4) **Relationship management** includes the abilities to communicate clearly and convincingly, disarm conflicts, and build strong personal bonds. Resonant leaders use these skills to spread their enthusiasm and solve disagreements, often with humor and kindness." (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, Primal Leadership, HBR Dec 2001)

A finding with consequences

The growing impact of the concept of E.I. lies in **three statements:**

a) **there is so much about ourselves that we don't know,**

b)that everything that happens to us is directly influenced- when not determined by how we think, feel and act,

c)the way we act has an impact on those that are around us, and vice versa



Know thyself

While this is not a new suggestion, it was hundred years ago that Freud ventured to write that we only are aware of a small percentage of what goes on in our minds: most of it is unconscious and we need to put some reflective effort if we want to be aware of why we do what we do.

Question: if we are forced to live with ourselves (and go along) during a lifetime, how come we are not taught from the beginning to understand better how our mind works, how the feelings push, why we tend to react in certain ways? Unless we take psychology courses or go into therapy, little do we learn and know about how we function. Why is this so? Therapy is not the only way to insight- as Zen and religion prove.

What can I do!?

“Everything that happens to us is directly influenced when not determined by how we think, feel and act.” This is a strong statement – and it needs some clarification. Definitely the way we personally think, feel or act did NOT cause the surprising events of 9/11 – but how those events impact on us personally – in other words, when an event goes from something happening out there to something that has an effect on my life – then, how I think, feel and act becomes determinant.

Let’s take an example given by Stone et al. in their book “Difficult Conversations”.(4) The scene is underwater and there is a diver who sees a shark . Her pulse increases, she begins to breathe faster and transpires. Now imagine the same scene, where she actually recognizes the type of white shark, and knows that that particular kind does not attack objects that are larger than itself, which is 5 ft. The diver, far from feeling fear, goes closer to take a better look at this animal.

The event (the shark swimming nearby) is the same – what changed is how the diver thought, felt and acted about that event. In other words, the way we think makes our life easier or more difficult to ourselves.

Surprisingly, we are more used to feel victims of circumstances, and depending on the culture, we take it with resignation , with melancholy – only sometimes reacting proactively. We are more used to blame than to ask ourselves **“What can I do to influence this?”**

Stone et al take it one step further, and invite US to explore the origins of a situation, asking ourselves a key question: **“How did I contribute to this?”** This challeng-

-ing question has a fast answer: “No way! This is just happening to me”. But this is not the real answer. Think of any unsatisfactory event in your life, ask yourself how you did contribute to that, and take your time to reflect. You will be surprised for what you will discover.

This is a very important step in the self-awareness process, because so much of our possibilities to have more successful experiences depends on realizing what we can avoid next time.

Permanent influence

The way we act has an impact on those that are around us, and vice versa. Goleman et al (3) indicates that “(...) a growing body of research on the human brain proves that, for better or worse, leaders’ moods affect the emotions of the people around them. The reason for that lies in what scientists call the open-loop nature of the brains’ limbic system, our emotional center. A closed-loop system is self-regulating, whereas an open-loop system depends on external sources to manage itself. In other words, **we rely on connections with other people to determine our moods.** The open-loop limbic system was a winning design in evolution because it let people come to one another’s emotional rescue – enabling a mother, for example, to soothe her crying infant. “

It is fair to assume that this is not a privilege of leaders, and that we all have an open-loop limbic system ready to be influenced – as well that we all are influencing those around us.

“Researchers have seen again and again how emotions spread irresistibly in this way whenever people are near to one another. As far back as 1981, psychologists Howard Friedman and Ronald Riggio found that even completely nonverbal expressiveness can affect other people. For example, when three strangers sit facing one another in silence for a minute or two, the most emotionally expressive of the three transmits his or her mood to the other two – without a single word being spoken.” (3)

Question: Are you aware of how you could be possibly influencing those around you with your moods of today? Or with your actions? 🌍



LIM

ARL™ News is published by Leadership in International Management - 1580 Sawgrass Corporate Parkway, Sunrise, FL 33323

Ph.: (954)315 4583 Fax: (305)692 1931 e-mail: info@LIMglobal.net; website: www.LIMglobal.net