

Emotional Intelligence and Mentoring – A Quintessential Alliance
by Rhianon Washington

In the 20 years or so since the first scientific paper on the subject was published, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has attracted a great deal of attention, particularly from those investigating success at work.

Some spectacular assertions have been made concerning its influence on achievement including a claim that cognitive ability or traditional academic intelligence contributes only about 20% towards general life success with 80% being directly attributable to EI.

So what is EI? In 1994, Salovey and Mayer, defined it as an organising framework for categorising abilities relating to understanding, managing and using not only our own feelings but those around us. Exhaustive efforts have been made to identify the specific features, factors, abilities and skills contributing to EI. While there is still no agreement on which components should be included, the most common characteristics can be bracketed broadly into 4 separate but interrelated categories – well-being, self control skills, emotional skills and social skills.

Writers have expressed proficiency in these facets in terms of:

- emotional literacy - knowledge and understanding of one's own emotions and how they operate
- emotional fitness – trustworthiness, emotional hardiness and flexibility
- emotional depth – emotional growth and intensity
- emotional alchemy – using emotions to identify creative opportunities

EI is often measured as a quotient (EQ), similar to the IQ in general intelligence and is very much correlated with success at work. Those with high EQ tend to be better communicators, possess teamwork social skills, build more supportive environments, have greater perceptions, better coping skills, generate more enthusiasm and optimism and are less prone to defensive decision making.

How then do we acquire EI? Most abilities and skills have been subjected to the nature versus nurture argument but whether, and the extent which, it is hereditary, congenital or the product of primary socialisation is largely irrelevant. We are what we are, and the key question is how we can achieve our full potential. Experience gained through work and life generally, together with developmental training, all contribute to refining our work skills.

The 'five domains' EI model (Daniel Goleman 1995) highlights knowing your own emotions, managing them and motivating yourself, as well as understanding other people's emotions and managing them and the relationship. How similar this is to our own developmental mentoring model: encouraging mentees to assume ownership of

their professional development, allowing mentors to step back so the mentee can lead the way, creating high levels of self awareness in both parties.

Cary Cherniss (The Handbook of Mentoring at Work 2007) contends that EI can significantly influence the quality of mentoring and vice versa, observing that EI of both mentor and mentee influences the quality of mentoring, and that quality mentoring helps people become socially and emotionally competent. Reinforcing EI through the medium of mentoring is feasible by robust compliance with the principles of good practice in developmental mentoring; working together as partners by giving and gaining respect through sincerity and honesty, cultivating awareness by showing empathy and effective listening and encouraging reflection through positive feedback and self analysis.

Mastery of this may take time but every step of the development process hones the skills of both mentor and mentee and yes, you've guessed it, your EI too.