

EQ test

How to settle disputes face-to-face

Question:

I read your column "You've Got Mail" in the September 19 issue. You were on the money that e-mail is used too much as a substitute for having a conversation. You spent too much time on the e-mail part, though. How about telling us more about how to get away from our computers and have real conversations? For example, the problem you dealt with in the column (an employee and a boss who use e-mail inappropriately) is a familiar one. Instead of trying to solve the problem electronically, why not sit down and talk it through?

Answer:

I appreciate this reader's feedback. The point is well made. While using e-mail more effectively is part of becoming a savvy communicator, it's only part of the equation. Another part has to do with becoming a more assertive communicator. As the reader points out, we need to move from behind our desks and talk with one another, especially when the topic is complex or potentially volatile or when high stakes issues are involved. In this column, then, I'll spend some time discussing some of the issues surrounding "tough talks."

At the outset, let me observe that communication proficiency and interpersonal effectiveness fall under the umbrella of a construct that has emerged on the scene over the past decade or so. Emotional quotient (EQ) is that

construct. Current research suggests that intellectual quotient (IQ) accounts for about 20 percent of the ingredients that make for success in one's career. The other 80 percent depends on the interaction of intelligence and the environment. That's where EQ comes into play.

According to Daniel Goleman, a well-regarded EQ author and researcher, "EQ is the ability to recognize and manage emotions, in yourself and others." EQ is, therefore, fundamentally different than IQ. In fact, using a sophisticated brain scan called positive emission tomography (PET), researchers have found that IQ is governed by the neocortex of our brains, while EQ is governed by the amygdala, a walnut-shaped structure deep in the limbic system. Additionally, a circuit has been discovered that lets a signal we see and hear go straight to the amygdala without passing through the neocortex. That's why we feel and act before we think (i.e., the "fight or flight" response.).

The following five factors have been identified as foundational to EQ:

- **Self-awareness:** Knowing what you feel and using your gut sense to make decisions you can live with happily.
- **Management of feelings:** Controlling impulses, soothing your anxiety, having anger that is appropriate.
- **Motivation:** Zeal, persistence and optimism in the face of setbacks.
- **Empathy:** Reading and responding to unspoken feelings.
- **Social skills:** Handling emotional reactions in others, interacting smoothly, and managing relationships effectively.

Some of you might be thinking that all of this sounds nice but, "So what?" Well, there is accumulating evidence that there are some very real advantages to a well-developed EQ. Here are just a few of the more intriguing findings:

- Marital research suggests that the primary determinant of marriage stability

is how well a couple handles emotional flashpoints. Empathy, listening, and the use of constructive criticism combine for stronger relationships.

- Researchers at the University of California found that being constantly hostile, anxious, or depressed doubles a person's chance of serious disease. This makes a poorly developed EQ a higher risk factor for serious disease than smoking.
- A University of Pennsylvania study found that sales representatives for MetLife who scored highest on the optimism scale of a personality test outsold by 57 percent those scoring low on the same measure.
- A study at the Center for Creative Leadership found that so-called "de-railed" executives (i.e., rising stars who crashed and burned) were two-times more likely to have an interpersonal flaw than a technical inability. That is, just like the old kindergarten report card, they didn't work and play well with others.

So, how do you go about putting your EQ-related skills to work? How do you tap into EQ and have the kinds of conversations that the reader references (e.g., "tough talks" between a boss and an employee)? According to Kerry Patterson and his colleagues, authors of the best selling books, *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Confrontations*, and *Influencer*, the place to start is by learning how to have "crucial conversations." Crucial conversations are discussions between two or more people that have three main characteristics: (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.

Basically, there are three ways of dealing with crucial conversations: (1) avoid them, (2) face them and handle them poorly, or (3) face them and handle them well.

Recognizing that you are in (or about to be in) a crucial conversation is the key to handling them well. The easiest way to recognize you are in a crucial conversation is to intentionally increase awareness of your emo-

tions. During a crucial conversation, people often experience the emotional “fight or flight” response. The fight reflex gives way to aggressive behavior. The flight reflex gives way to silence and/or avoidance.

To master crucial conversations, seven steps are needed:

1. Start with heart.

Start with yourself and examine the role you play in crucial conversations.

2. Learn to look.

Learn to see any signs of safety that are at risk.

3. Make it safe.

Make it safe for others to speak candidly without experiencing negative results.

4. Master my stories.

Learn to master emotions and the stories that create them.

5. State my path.

Learn to speak assertively, not aggressively.

6. Explore other's paths.

Learn to actively listen to the perspectives of other people.

7. Move to action.

Learn to make mutually agreeable decisions as a basis for encouraging interdependence and accountability.

In conclusion, the prescription here is to become proficient in initiating and carrying out crucial conversations and encourage others to do the same. In doing so, you might just find that less time is spent sending and receiving e-mails that contain a lot of information but don't get to the heart of the matter.

Getting to the heart of the matter requires person-person interactions where both informational content and feelings about the content are well-handled.

My message to you in this column is that getting to the heart of the matter requires application of EQ in the form of crucial conversations.



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