



Book Emotional Intelligence for Managing Results in a Diverse World

The Hard Truth about Soft Skills in the Workplace

Lee Gardenswartz, Jorge Cherbosque and Anita Rowe
Davies-Black, 2008
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Recommendation

Feelings and emotions affect how people perform their jobs, of course, and shape the tenor of their workplaces. The impact and applicability of emotional intelligence (EI) at work is well established. If you’re ready for a more focused treatment, Lee Gardenswartz, Jorge Cherbosque and Anita Rowe offer this manual about the use of EI in working with and managing all kinds of people. They submit that dealing with human differences triggers a variety of emotions, many of which are counterproductive. They provide a four-part “Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Model” to help managers handle their emotions – and their diverse employees – effectively. The book includes an assortment of exercises, charts and quizzes to help raise your emotional intelligence. *BooksInShort* finds that this quite specific guide is very useful for managers, particularly less experienced ones, whose workplaces present diversity challenges.

Take-Aways

- You need emotional intelligence to succeed in today’s diverse workplace.
- If not managed properly, your emotions will cause problems at work and at home.
- Your emotions drive the way you react to people who are different.
- The “Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Model” can help you lead diverse employees and govern your emotions. It has four parts:
- Part one, “affirmative introspection,” is the process of knowing, understanding and accepting your identity.
- Your core beliefs define who you are and guide your behavior.
- Part two, “self-governance,” is the way you deal with your emotions by becoming comfortable with ambiguity and change.
- Part three, “intercultural literacy,” calls for understanding other cultures.
- Part four, “social architecting,” is building the skills you need to form relationships.
- A manager who is acting as a social architect creates a strong communication system and establishes a method for resolving conflicts.

Summary

“Feelings, Nothing More Than Feelings...”

Your feelings are an essential part of who you are. That doesn’t change at work, where feelings affect performance. In fact, your emotions supply the fuel that drives your energy, enthusiasm and inspiration. However, emotions also can be a source of anger and frustration. If not managed properly, they can cause problems in your workplace.

“Over the past decade, emotional intelligence has come to be seen more and more as a critical underpinning of success on and off the job.”

Those who cope best with their emotions have well-developed emotional intelligence (EI), “the ability to understand and deal with feelings, both your own and those of others, in a healthy and constructive way.”

Feelings are your body’s way of telling you that something significant is happening. Suppressing them has negative consequences. Unexpressed feelings may cause dysfunctional behaviors, including anxiety, depression or substance abuse. Unfortunately, societal expectations condition many people from early childhood to disregard their feelings. Just think of common phrases like “chill out,” “big boys don’t cry” or “keep a stiff upper lip.” Unacknowledged emotions can still influence behavior; to be able to manage your feelings, you first have to recognize them.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a skill you can develop that allows you to tap into your feelings and harness their energy. The five steps toward achieving emotional intelligence are:

1. “Identify the feelings you are experiencing.”
2. “Understand your feeling response.”
3. “Manage your emotional response.”
4. “Communicate your feelings and needs to others.”
5. “Apply the power of emotions to your relationships.”

“The emotional intelligence you need to deal with diversity includes both insight and action, both knowing and doing.”

Today’s work environment is increasingly diverse. That presents an often-unacknowledged emotional challenge. Dealing with a huge array of cultures, lifestyles and social expectations can cause emotional turmoil. Your feelings drive the way you react to people, especially those who are different. Once you understand your reactions, you can begin to respond in appropriate, constructive ways. If you are a manager, this understanding affects your actions and the guidance you can give your employees.

“Feelings are there, whether you like it or not. If you don’t acknowledge and manage them, they’ll be managing you, your relationships and your workplace environment.”

Every human has a primary need to feel safe. To foster a sense of safety, people strive to gain control and to win others’ approval. When confronted by someone else’s differences, a person may feel threatened and lose control. If you feel threatened, keeping an open mind will lessen your fear. Try to diagnose what element of your situation seems to endanger your sense of safety.

“Four Layers of Diversity”

Values, upbringing, tendencies, styles and characteristics shape personality, the core of a sociological model that identifies four layers of diversity. Layer one is natural chemistry, which plays a nonobjective part in relationships. You will like some people immediately but you will find others off-putting. The second layer of diversity covers basic, unchangeable characteristics, such as “age, gender, physical ability, ethnicity and race.” The third layer is made up of fluid characteristics that can change, such as income, hobbies, education, appearance, and marital and parental status. The fourth and most external layer relates to your workplace’s location, structure, size and tasks.

“Like wind or water, emotions are an unharnessed source of energy that operates, influencing situations and directing your behavior.”

The world of work has changed and keeps changing. Demographics are constantly in flux and globalization affects every part of professional life. Employees must learn how to cope with others’ differences. People who are not like you work in the next cubicle, report to you or supervise you. In today’s workplace, you need a new kind of emotional intelligence that gives you the acuity and sense of purpose to deal well with diversity. The “Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Model” offers four areas you can explore to build your emotional intelligence as it relates to diversity:

1. “Affirmative Introspection”

Before you can manage other people, you must deal with your own emotions. Affirmative introspection “is about acknowledging, owning and accepting who you are – the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly.” You can influence others, but you can’t force them to change. The only changes you truly control are within yourself. Begin by examining your feelings, behaviors and values. Consider how you react to those who differ from you. Look at yourself without judgment and acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses. To make affirmative introspection work for you, assume an attitude of objective curiosity and pursue these six steps:

1. “Identify a behavior, feeling or situation” where you’d like to have better self-control.
2. “Suspend all judgment about your feelings, your thoughts and your discoveries.”
3. Determine “the relevance of the situation or behavior you are trying to understand.”
4. Examine the good and bad effects that such actions or circumstances have on you.
5. Acknowledge which emotions they provoke in you.
6. Consider what these realizations teach that you can apply to become more objective.

“Conversations, relationships and interpersonal interactions are like sheet music, with both lyrics and a melody.”

Looking inward involves “knowing what makes you tick, being comfortable in your own skin and being aware of your own biases and hot buttons.” To build awareness of emotions that motivate you, examine the messages you received as a child. Your background, experiences, culture and family values shaped your closely held ideas.

Some of these beliefs are positive and constructive, some are not, but they all affect your behavior. Identifying these concepts can help you choose a workplace that will inspire and motivate you, and bring out your best. Communicate your stories and values to your staffers. Get to know their beliefs, values and experiences. Sharing this knowledge will help you design a work environment that will boost harmony and productivity.

“Bottom line: The path to loving, respecting and accepting others is to love, respect and accept yourself first.”

Your hot buttons are sensitive areas that trigger your negative emotions and can lead to volatile reactions you may regret later. Don’t be like Yvette, a human resources director, who sent an e-mail in anger only to find out afterward – to her chagrin – that she had misinterpreted the situation.

“Stereotypes, biases and hot buttons are the opinions, beliefs and knee-jerk reactions that all people have about others.”

To temper your reactions, first identify your hot buttons. Then you can recognize and manage your responses without feeling threatened or losing control. When you don’t like something about yourself, you will tend to criticize it in others. But, when you are comfortable with yourself, other people’s differences won’t threaten or challenge you. Accepting who you are will make you more tolerant and help you craft a positive work environment.

2. “Self-Governance”

Self-governance is the vehicle by which you manage your emotions constructively. It is based on each human being’s dual needs for “control and approval.” Governing yourself requires “making ambiguity an ally, becoming a change master and getting in charge of your self-talk.” You can use the “three A’s” to become a change master:

1. “Alter the situation to make the change more favorable.”
2. “Alter your behavior so you can cope with the change effectively.”
3. “Accept the new change by developing a positive perspective about it.”

“What you don’t know can hurt you when it comes to your emotional reactions and those of your subordinates or colleagues.”

Most dilemmas offer a range of choices instead of clear right or wrong answers. Many people find such ambiguity unsettling. To learn how to handle that uneasiness, first identify your choices and conflicts. Try to become comfortable with the fact that you may not have quick solutions. All you can do is weigh your options, use your best judgment and make the most appropriate decision. If you have a negative response to change, manage it by accepting that you feel threatened, as many people do by rapid shifts in their circumstances. Acknowledge the emotional impact of change and try to gain a new perspective by viewing it as an opportunity.

“It is often the feeling of being out of control and unable to gain the approval of others that leads people to react emotionally.”

Whether your internal dialogue is positive or negative, uplifting or defeating, it will tend to be self-fulfilling. If you think to yourself that you are awkward, stupid or sure to fail, you will have a hard time succeeding. Affirmative, healthy self-talk gives you a more confident foundation for achieving your goals. Take control of your internal messages by being aware of what you tell yourself. Dispute exaggerated or negative self-talk. Try to feel grateful for the good in your life.

3. “Intercultural Literacy”

Your culture provides rules, customs and standards for conduct, and a sense of how to interpret others’ behavior. Intercultural literacy, the ability to comprehend the actions of people from different cultures and backgrounds, rests on three “maps”: 1) “learn the cultural whys behind behavior,” 2) “look for the upsides and downsides of all cultural norms” and 3) “challenge yourself to transcend your own perspective and show empathy.”

“Managing their own emotions can prevent people from destroying one another and may result in a redirection of energy into building a world – or at least a workplace – where respect, synergy and compassion rule.”

Cultural norms vary not just among countries, but also among communities. They influence everything from how people communicate to how they eat and how close they stand to one another. As a manager, you are responsible for developing awareness and understanding of your employees’ cultures. To build their tolerance of other’s different styles and attitudes, promote an atmosphere of “acceptance and patience.” Make it clear that people need to adapt to each other. Don’t let your staffers fall into the trap of assuming that just because people are different, they are inferior. Managers who can see the upsides and downsides of various cultures are better equipped to enable their team members to deal with the emotions that diversity provokes. Empathetic managers inspire loyalty and dedication in their employees.

“It is normal, natural and often most comfortable to approach cultural differences from an ethnocentric perspective, seeing your own way as right or superior.”

The ability to feel and express empathy is essential to good management. Recall experiences from your past that help you relate to other people’s concerns. Acknowledge their perceptions. Relinquish your conclusions about a situation and look at it from someone else’s point of view. Empathy takes the focus off you and allows you to see another person with compassion. It requires you to avoid being judgmental and to “listen with your heart.”

4. “Social Architecting”

Social architecting is the ability to build relationships within teams, and among individuals and groups. It involves engineering a process for settling disagreements, developing a strong communication network and fostering a safe, productive, innovative work environment. Social architecting calls on four managerial skills:

1. “Serving as a cultural interpreter.”
2. “Communicating effectively.”
3. “Resolving conflicts in diverse settings.”
4. “Structuring a synergistic and compelling environment.”

“In today’s complex, globalized world, there is always a need to bridge differences and build understanding.”

A cultural interpreter is a bridge builder who can translate and decode another culture’s behavioral norms into relatable terms. One style of communication will not work with everyone. To communicate across cultures, adapt your style to each person’s age, gender, education, language and background. To settle disagreements among people with divergent cultural assumptions, use the four-step “heart of the matter” conversational process:

- 1. **“Sensory conversation”** – Try to describe the situation accurately.
- 2. **“Brain conversation”** – Discuss your interpretation of the situation.
- 3. **“Feeling conversation”** – Acknowledge how the situation makes you feel.
- 4. **“Soul conversation”** – Talk about how you’d like to resolve the situation.

“In most of life’s dilemmas, there is no right or wrong answer, only different paths.”

Your goal is to create a workplace where people want to spend their time because they feel valued, creative, productive and connected to their colleagues, however diverse they are.

About the Authors

Lee Gardenswartz, Ph.D., is a diversity trainer and a principal in a management consulting company. **Anita Rowe**, Ph.D., is a diversity consultant and partner in the Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute. She and Gardenswartz also published *Managing Diversity* and the *Global Diversity Desk Reference*. **Jorge Cherbosque**, Ph.D., teaches at the Anderson School of Management at UCLA and is co-director of the staff Counseling and Consulting Center.
