

EQ: a key tool for success

First published in the June 2005 issue of *ESKOM NEWS*

For many men the term 'emotional intelligence' - or EQ as it's more commonly known - sounds contradictory, a bit like the idea of a 'fun run'. But with EQ there's no contradiction. When it boils down, EQ is a key tool in being able to get your own way. It has nothing to do with 'touchy-feely' pink-blouse stuff and shouldn't be confused with weeping in the boardroom. In fact emotional intelligence is the very foundation that great people have built their achievements upon. As such it's high up on the list of study for anyone striving for success.

No one can survive or succeed on their own and unless one has the skills to get other people's co-operation, success becomes elusive.

Developing a healthy level of EQ is a two-fold attack. Firstly it's about managing oneself and secondly it's about knowing how to push someone else's buttons to get what you want out of them. Yet, even though experience teaches us this, how many people still use inappropriate styles to force others to cooperate. However, instead of throwing one's toys, be aware that everyone has buttons that will get a good response and it's a matter of finding these in each individual.

But the place to start is with oneself. For women this may be easier than for men. Traditionally boys are taught that emotions are for girls. So from a very early age boys are taught to suppress their feelings. We now know that expressing emotions is a source of shame for males and it is this very shame that forces men to lobotomise their feelings. They end up feeling nothing. No joy, sadness nor excitement.

However, emotions won't be anaesthetised forever and at some point there will be an explosion. Anger is the most powerful feeling and in cases of long-term emotional suppression, this is the one emotion that breaks through the numbness.

So much so that Claude Steiner - author of *Achieving Emotional Literacy*- claims that this emotional paralysis is often the source of violent behaviour - behaviours like road rage, spousal abuse and even serial killers.

If you suppress the very system that makes you feel alive, Steiner believes that acts of rage are the only time these individuals feel human.

But in reality suppressing emotions means shutting off a powerful source of information - information that allows one to control one's existence. Emotions are a robust system offering useful feedback about the choices we're making. Bad decisions make us feel uncomfortable and this discomfort works much like a warning light in a motorcar. When something's wrong a light alerts us to act, to do something to change the situation. It's the same with our emotions.

Emotions provide a stream of feedback that can be decoded like a language. For instance, anger is a clear message telling us we're not getting our own way. Yelling at someone seldom helps but working out a 'win-win' solution probably will make all the difference. The 'win-win' she claims is a known difficulty for men because boys are taught to be competitive. Yet good leaders with wisdom know that this is the ultimate win. The only other option is frustration, which too holds an important message.

If you're feeling frustrated the feeling is telling you to change something; your attitude, your approach, or even your job. In pursuit of relieving frustration we often believe that other people must change but, with all the best will in the world, we can't change anyone else but ourselves. However, we *can* change how we respond to other people. This will cause them to react differently and don't stop changing your reaction until you get the response you're wanting. Sure it takes effort but how much sweat goes into losing one's temper or resigning oneself to frustration?

So working more appropriately with our emotions is not about being a softy, it is in fact a logical and rational process.

In addition feelings are also the basis of real motivation. In reality only two things motivate us:

1. creating the life we want or
2. moving away from the things we don't like or don't want.

Number one has a more powerful pull than number two. The second form is a bit like driving one's motorcar with only the rear-view mirror to guide you. This second form is where so many South Africans get stuck. For decades we were trying to move away from a system that was untenable. Now it's become a habit.

Instead we'd be far better off looking forward to what we're creating. This is particularly relevant in one's own life. Here it's important to understand that the decisions we make today will dictate our lives tomorrow. But sadly too few people are prepared to look into their own future and the implications are dire. In a world that's changing rapidly we continue to naively hope that our personal universe will remain the same. This belief is what derails many people's lives.

So what could the future hold? For starters, about 50% of the world's working population will be technically unemployed over the next few years. This doesn't mean that people will never work again, but we will all work differently. So instead of having a salary at month end or a sturdy pension to rely on, our only security, in future, will come from what we can do or produce. When people grasp this they can prepare for far more self-reliance - a habit many find difficult to get used to.

As part of a global trend, the economy is forcing more entrepreneurs into the market. However, if people define themselves too narrowly, many will have to resort to a piece of crumpled cardboard at the traffic lights for a living.

Certainly where EQ comes into its own is in the area of entrepreneurial business. Daniel Goleman - who popularised the EQ trend with his book - *Emotional Intelligence* - shows that many people with a high IQ work for those with an average IQ, but higher than normal EQ. This makes sense.

Business requires guts to take risks, creativity, perseverance, picking oneself up from failures and the ability to persuade customers, suppliers, staff and even the bank manager. All are important EQ skills made more powerful by an unshaken belief in oneself.

One of the cornerstones of EQ is having a healthy self-esteem and it's easier than it seems. Self-esteem is the ability to accept oneself 'warts and all'. It is not to be confused with arrogance. Arrogant people tend to have a veneer of self-belief because they're always talking about themselves. But in reality they're very insecure people. They try to persuade others about their greatness precisely because they don't believe in it themselves.

How we feel about ourselves is important because our level of self-esteem shows. It also determines the outcome of everything we do. So if you're going for an interview, it will dictate whether you get the job. Likewise on a date, your self-belief will determine whether you end up going home alone.

And while we're on the topic of sex, be aware that 'lust' is not an emotion. Sure it's a powerful physical sensation but often not one backed by much intelligence! But if what you're wanting is to get your own way - in bed or at the office - a healthy level of EQ is a far more persuasive tool than a few weeks of begging!

Stephanie Vermeulen of *The Effective Training Corporation* runs practical training programmes on Applied EQ in business and public forums as well as being an inspiring conference speaker and personal coach.

Her books, *Stitched-up: Who Fashions Women's Lives?* and *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone* are available from all leading bookstores and online from Amazon and Kalahari. She can be contacted on:

Phone: +27 11 486 1211

e-mail: steph@theeqsite.co.za

website: www.theeqsite.co.za