

Enhancing Your Emotional Intelligence for Success in Business

Got smarts?! I'm not referring to IQ – I'm asking about your ability to understand yourself, read others, and adapt to situations that occur in your daily work life. Regardless of our organizational role, each of us has the ability to enhance our EQ, or Emotional Intelligence. In this article, I'll recommend concrete steps that individuals can take to develop their innate verbal, visual-spatial, intrapersonal, and interpersonal elements of Emotional Intelligence for success in the workplace.

Ways to Enhance Verbal Abilities

Do you ever find yourself searching for just the right word, either when writing a letter or explaining how you feel about an issue? To expand your vocabulary, the Thesaurus can be your new best friend. In many word processing software programs, a Thesaurus is included in the Tools section of the menu. Take a minute when you're composing to look up words that are the best fit for your intended meaning. If you're about to make a presentation, whether it's for a conference or an internal staff meeting, pull out a hard copy of a Thesaurus and check for similar words to those you're considering but aren't completely satisfied are "just right."

For some people, daily journaling is cathartic and a wonderful way to capture thoughts, impressions, and reactions to one's everyday existence. If you haven't ever kept a journal, consider starting one. This is a terrific – and private – way to become accustomed to using the written word as a means of personal expression. Stationery stores offer a wide selection of journals, from the basic notes pages style to hardbound fancier styles. The cover isn't what's important – the opportunity to capture your thoughts, hopes, and dreams in writing is the key.

One of the best ways to enhance your verbal skills, especially presentation skills, is to attend a program such as the Dale Carnegie Course or Toastmasters. No, I don't receive a commission for referring people to these programs. I do believe, however, that this and other presentation skills workshops can provide an excellent practice medium to get past shyness and a sense of inadequacy in giving presentations. Courses such as this provide a foundation of platform techniques first, followed by an opportunity to plan, give and receive feedback for mini-presentations on a regular basis. The secret to skill building is practice, and a course such as Dale Carnegie can afford a safe environment for honing one's skills.

If you have a car and a CD or DVD player in said car, then you have an opportunity to develop your verbal ability! Instead of listening to the same music over and over, why not occasionally listen to a book on tape? Not only will you be entertained, but you will be hearing words that are new (or words you know used in different ways). Of course you could also listen to audiotapes of workshops and conferences with the same end result.

For some of us, 8th grade English class is a distant memory. We learned in 7th and 8th grade how to diagram sentences and use grammar correctly. We can't all go back to junior high and audit an English class; however, you could purchase an English textbook and browse through it in our leisure time. This would refresh your recollection of the proper use of our beautiful language, both in verbal and written form.

One final recommendation for expanding verbal ability is to volunteer to act in a local theater group. Not each of us is a "ham" that wants to take center stage; however, many local theater groups need people who are willing to audition for smaller parts. Acting can take us outside of ourselves and serve as a wonderful stress reducer, and can provide a way to become less intimidated by an audience. (By the way, with the stage lights it's impossible to tell whether there's an audience of 10 or 100!)

Enhancing Your Visual/Spatial Abilities

I've heard many of my friends and coworkers say, "I'm just not creative!" You may have more creativity locked inside you than you realize. The key to unlocking that creative bent is to engage in some different types of activities to stretch those "brain muscles".

One suggestion is to take an art or photography class, even if you haven't ever had an interest in pursuing either as an avocation, let alone a vocation. This type of class will guide you towards leaning on your visual sense of proportion and color and placing items in relationship to one another for the best possible effect. I scored abysmally in all the 8th grade standardized tests on visual/spatial ability, and I took a series of photography classes when I was 21. I expanded my visual senses to appreciate how objects look juxtaposed to one another and to understand how to frame an excellent shot so that people and scenery are shown to their best advantage.

This may sound strange, especially for you ladies: take a basic auto repair class at a local high school or vocational school. Auto mechanics must have a solid sense of "what goes where" and the impact of one part on several other parts. This type of class will provide you with the knowledge to understand what estimates *really* mean and heighten your "feel" for shapes and sizes of objects.

A practice you can engage in while you're all alone is to write directions to your house from several different locations. This exercise promotes a sense of geography and your ability to see in your "mind's eye" where the target location is in relationship to a fixed point. As you become more adept at this skill, people to whom you provide directions will be very grateful!

You can enhance your visual/spatial skills AND have fun at the same time by purchasing and playing with children's building block toys, such as LEGO's. While some of the toys are fairly basic, LEGO also has more sophisticated toys to put together, such as race cars and rocket ships, which are definitely challenging. If you have young children or grandchildren, you're in luck – you can use them as your "cover" to practice!

Enhancing Intrapersonal Skills

More men than women have confessed to me that this is a weak area for them because they weren't encouraged as children to be introspective and reflective. Yet, one of the best ways to minimize making the same mistake twice is to reflect on lessons learned from past errors in judgment. The suggestions below are intended to get you more in tune with yourself and build your understanding of why you do the things you do.

My first recommendation is for you to start a journal and keep it up on a daily basis. You may be thinking, "what do I write about?" Write about what you did that day, your dreams and how you moved forward to achieving those dreams, and the people with whom you interacted and how they affected you. Those we know who keep a journal have reported this to be very cathartic because they can vent without actually saying something out loud that they'll regret later. Going back over what you've written in the previous month can provide insights to how certain people, events, and the world around you affect and influence your behaviors.

If you haven't had an opportunity to take a personality profile such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or True Colors, this could provide insights into your personality and why you react the way you do to certain people or situations. These indicators are not "tests" – you can't fail. Through a series of event-centered or people-centered questions, these profiles assess the way people take in information, process that information, and respond to the world around them. When I took the MBTI years ago, I had that "aha" moment that comes to those who aren't sure why some people just push all their buttons, or some situations are clearly uncomfortable.

A career coach could also help you understand your true wants and desires; specifically, in terms of the direction you want to take your career. If you're solid on that front, you might consider a life coach whose role is to ask you the tough questions: What do you really want out of life? What makes you happy? What volunteer activities will help you grow personally and professionally? The coach does not answer the questions for you. The coach guides you towards finding the answers and being truthful with yourself first and foremost.

I've studied T'ai Chi for years, beginning when I lived in Southeast Asia. T'ai Chi is a combination of dance, toning, and self discipline. In T'ai Chi, the body is calmly and steadily moving and bringing in energy to fuel the body and the brain. The quiet time necessary to move through a series of what appear to be dance steps has the secondary benefit of opening the mind for introspection and reflection. Only 20 – 30 minutes a day is necessary for maximum benefit.

Enhancing Interpersonal Skills

If you're an introverted, reserved person, you may desire to build your interpersonal skills in order to relate effectively to people at work or socially. The following suggestions are tailored to that end.

My first recommendation is to take a course on negotiation or conflict resolution. Courses of this type require that individuals consider others' needs and wants in order to offer solutions to problems they have in common. Successful conflict resolution requires all parties involved to think creatively to find ways to improve a process or address a problem. Conflict resolution workshops teach people to "get over themselves" and think about what others might want in order to agree to a course of action. These workshops also teach people to articulate their own wants and needs effectively so their feelings are clearly understood.

Most fields have a professional organization that meets on a regular basis. Membership and active involvement on a committee are wonderful ways to enhance interpersonal skills. To best take advantage of membership, go to most of the meeting during the social hour and walk from group to group to introduce yourself. Join a committee so that you know and interact with at least those people in the organization.

If you don't tune in to peoples' "body language" during conversations, start doing this. If there's a discrepancy between the words someone is saying and their body language, discount the words and rely on the message they're sending inadvertently. Having a sense of the entire message helps you become a better listener, ask probe questions when there's a disconnect between body language and words, and takes you "out of yourself" to build better interpersonal skills.

My last suggestion serves many purposes: get a dog, take it for walks, and talk to other walkers. If you're not comfortable just starting a conversation with people you meet, a dog is a terrific vehicle to break down barriers. I'm 5 feet 2 inches tall and had an Irish Wolfhound (about 100 pounds) for several years. I couldn't walk more than a block without someone stopping to comment about that, which started some excellent conversations and friendships.

The central message in this article is a simple one: you can build your Emotional Intelligence on a day by day basis. I've offered a few suggestions in order to get you thinking, and I'm certain you can use them as a springboard for even more techniques!

(This article is an excerpt from Linda's book, Using Your Emotional Intelligence to Develop Others, which will be released by Palgrave MacMillan in August, 2009.)

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