

“EQ as Important as IQ in the Workplace”

by Alice Rush, MA, MCDP

What is EQ? It’s an acronym that stands for “Emotional Quotient” as opposed to the Intelligence Quotient (IQ). It is that desirable characteristic of emotional maturity and work strategy skill. A high EQ is so desired by employers, that interviewers consistently will ask questions to measure EQ for virtually ANY position one applies for.

One example of an EQ related interview question would be, “Tell me about a time you had a conflict with a co-worker? What did you do, and what was the result?” I cannot tell you how many clients I’ve worked with who cannot give an example of a conflict that ended in a positive result.

Ability to manage conflict positively and proactively is only one aspect of EQ, however. Potential employers also want to assess whether an interview candidate may be a complainer. Hence, the interview question, “What did you like least about your last job? Why are you leaving? And, What didn’t you like about your boss?”

Ah yes, these negatively posed questions designed to measure how well a candidate manages adversity and workplace relationships. Is the candidate proactive? Do they step back and assess difficult situations objectively, or do they complain and take no positive courageous action? I use the word courageous, because I don’t know very many people who seek out conflict and confrontation. It does require courage, and the more we know about how to navigate ourselves through these difficult situations diplomatically, the higher our EQ becomes. We truly become empowered the more we build conflict resolution skills, yet it does take courage and in many cases- requires some communication skill training. While working on our communication skills (after all, no one is perfect- almost everyone needs help with this), the most effective way to answer the above mentioned EQ related interview question is to state what you learned from the situation. What did you learn about yourself? How would you have handled it differently, next time? What did you learn about the temperament style of the other person involved? It’s always best to handle negatively posed interview questions with ‘what you learned from the situation.’ This act of self-awareness, conscious living, and striving for self-improvement exemplifies high EQ. Employers want to hire those with positive and proactive mental attitudes. Employees want to work with peers and managers with high EQ.

Another common question is whether ‘EQ is learned or inherent?’ Personality theory supports that EQ is BOTH learned and inherent. How do we encourage high EQ in our children so they will be effective in their professional and personal lives? One of the most obvious rules is:

- 1) Don’t give children everything they want. Hardship cultivates character. When children are given everything they want, they lack ‘disappointment related’ coping skills. Later in life, when jobs and life situations are less than perfect, they lack the skills to persevere and to be proactive. Giving children everything also sets unrealistic standards and altered perceptions, where the “poor me syndrome” overrides other more effective coping mechanisms.

- 2) Giving children chores and responsibilities builds self efficacy (when I take action and do something, I have a positive result.) Again, chores help build high EQ, especially when recognition is given for a job well done.

How do we strengthen our EQ as adults? High EQ is essentially an existential attitude. A conscious self-awareness that external situations and people are typically out of our control, yet our attitude always remains within our control. If we find our EQ slipping, one method to give yourself a 'boost' is to catch yourself complaining and ask yourself, 'Is there anything I can do to make the situation better?' If the answer is no, then why put your emotions and your body through the agony of complaining. Then ask yourself, 'Is there anything positive I can gain or learn from this situation?'

Here's how challenging a complaint may work on your behalf. Let's say you hate your commute and you complain about it on a daily basis. Perhaps you only complain silently to yourself, but it's taking the edge off of the possible joy in your life. Here are some replacement statements, thoughts and ideas that can help change your attitude, feeling of happiness and help build your EQ:

1. My commute gives me time to learn from a multitude of 'books-on-tape.' I've learned several languages, and plan to visit Italy on vacation next year. Everyday I go to work, I put myself in Italy and learn the language. I never would have time for this at home with my two small kids. I'm thankful for my commute!
2. My commute is nothing compared to other people who live here and still have jobs in the bay area, or who travel for a living-have expansive territories- and who are in their car all day long.

Positive realistic perspective is critical for high EQ. If you feel that life is 'picking on you' and your EQ is disintegrating, some of my clients find that volunteering to work with people less privileged often helps to keep a realistic and healthy perspective. I am not an advocate for 'affirmations' or positive re-framing messages that have no real or authentic meaning for the individual. These positive replacement statements need to be almost factual for change in perception, otherwise they will be empty, and they will not work.

Finally, for those of you who want to raise your EQ further, workshops and classes on conflict management, understanding different temperament types, assertiveness and diplomatic communication skills all assist in building EQ and are often delivered through company EAP providers, Therapists, Community College Classes, and University Extension Courses.

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