

Leadership, Sushi & Email: It Takes Two To Tango

“Why Emotional Intelligence Doesn’t Work”

A colleague of mine Bill Bergquist thought that “leadership, sushi and email would make a good book title so I’m trying it out. It actually has nothing to do directly with what I’m about to write about...and perhaps some of you may find that perturbing. Since I’ve learned that I’m the kind of person who has to ask forgiveness because I don’t ask for permission, I’ll say “I’m sorry about that” now to get it over with.

AND, that brings me to my topic...emotional intelligence, or in deference to myself, the lack of it.

The story I’m about to tell you is real, some of the names have been changed to protect the guilty, I mean the innocent, because I’m guilty!

Ok, here’s the deal.

For the past 7 years, I’ve realized that emotional intelligence is a misnomer. Most people who are using it are really failing to see that emotional intelligence is not the right standard to measure superior performance and I’ll try to use my own example.

Since early qualifying back in the late 90s for emotional intelligence assessment work with my clients, I first began to use the material on myself. I knew, even at that time, that I was a perfect candidate. If it could work with me, it could work with anyone.

Now, 7 years later, I’ll say it hasn’t worked.

Of course you could say that it’s just me and I’m sure you could find a majority to agree. Yet here’s why this is important beyond the disclosure of my own results.

Have you ever heard, “it takes two to tango?”

In emotional intelligence, one of the things I’ve found out the hard way is that it is “followers that make leaders emotionally intelligent.” Here’s what I mean.

For some people and I “are” one, our systems are wired with a little thing called fight, usually associated with competitive people and not uncommon to a number of leaders.

In other words, we’re limited in terms of our ability to draw on other skills because of an underlying motivation for a lot of things...most of which anyone who has had some psychological training would consider “bad.” That’s why I warn most leaders to stay away from people who are constantly labeling people with one of those diagnoses found in any medical billing manual. Yikes, in my career, I’ve been labeled by many of these people in some pathological way or

another.

Quite simply, the best of us---warriors—and the worst in us---dictatorial steamrollers are not pathologies, they are ways of coping. Now, many people claim that we are not emotionally intelligent. Yet, I'll take a warrior any day in the world we live in. No, it's not going to be pretty and in some cases, it's downright alarming and really hard on people, but there is still a place for people wired up as warriors.

And if we warriors can keep from being “convinced” that there is something wrong with us, we can live pretty collaborative lives.

Yet, it won't be by working on our selves. For the most part, it just doesn't work. I will say in one short sentence that it's damned hard to make any progress on being anything but a warrior. And here's the key. If you get into a design that is NOT “emotionally intelligent” you'll be hung out to dry, or banished from the crowd, believe me on this one.

Ok, word to the warriors, stop trying to change yourselves and get yourself into a design that is emotionally intelligent.

Second, to all you people who need warriors (and more and more of you will SOON)---people who have ideas, are willing to persist, be stubborn, passionate and full of energy, and are NOT emotionally intelligent in the “touchy-feely” form emotional intelligence is involving into...then learn how to motivate and work with these people—make them emotionally intelligent.

Here's a real story from the heart.

This morning I was having a conversation with colleagues about one of my latest ideas. Now, when I get one of these and take responsibility for it, it's an investment for me and an attachment. Yes, yes, of course this is “the” problem for all you analyzers, I shouldn't get attached. But sometimes, you just do, let's not psychoanalyze me, let's just assume I'm not emotionally intelligent and let it go at that...I agree with you.

While I was trying to relate, which might look like fighting to some...I found myself becoming more and more passionate about some really simple things, that in all retrospect, are not really that big of a deal...yet, here's what happens to us warriors in the “battle.” And again, yes, yes, I know it's not supposed to be a battle, but live inside my skin for a moment.

During the “battle” if you perceive that other people are “battling” you, your amygdale response and threshold heightens...leaving less and less room for conscious choice as the reptile in us (the things that make us win battles, i.e. warriors analogy to compete) gains a greater hold--becoming more sensitive to triggering.

Now, the EI experts will tell you this is the beginning of an amygdale attack as your neurophysiology puts you into the “low road” (thalamic system) and you lose the ability to be diplomatic, tactful, relationship-oriented, etc. etc. by remaining conscious in the high road (neo cortex) The warriors who have been through emotional intelligence training know all of this. And it’s not that we don’t want to change. Quite frankly after the conversation this morning, I felt deeply frustrated with my own lack of emotional intelligence. This is not about knowing what to do and what’s causing all this stuff, this is about being in the grasp of your strengths...and here’s the important part.

When people try to “neuter” us warriors through everything from sensitivity training to anything else you want to put in the blank, you’re merely creating a wash over effect that works while these people are not attached, or if they are hellaciously lucky, surrounded by people who have the “strengths” to understand how to work with these people.

I know this is way too long, but if you’ve read this far, let me say a couple more things:

1. Emotional Intelligence shouldn’t be about change, it should be about design.

Because it takes two to tango, if one person is not emotionally intelligent, then I can and will find another “collaborator” who pushes this person’s buttons, or fails to note this person’s strengths. They don’t call us warriors because we lose! I often tell people based on the story of the frog and scorpion. You know where the scorpion talks the frog into giving him a ride across the pond and then stings him part way and they both drown? As they’re going down, the frog says why are you killing us both and the scorpion says, “it’s just my nature.”

2. Don’t poke the shark.

To me, and I know this is probably not coming through as clear as I wish it would, emotional intelligence is always about “all” the people in a fight! Not just the one everyone labels as lacking emotional intelligence. In other words, I can show you how to take a person who at “resting motivation” demonstrates fairly high levels of emotional intelligence and turn them into something that could only happen through their "bizarre" collaboration with others. Therefore, this is not about pulling someone aside and coaching them, this is about coaching the entire team.

3. Blank Slate is Dead

Forget about how much or whether or not people can learn. If you keep thinking that people can learn, if they want to bad enough, you’ll keep making the same mistakes with warriors and many other types of leaders. You can’t convince me I don’t want to learn. You can’t convince me that I am not motivated to develop

emotional intelligence. Yet, why isn't it working for me? Am I dumb, block-headed, or oppositional? No, I am not willing to compromise who I am to be something which is unnatural to me even when it means "we" drown. For ME, the only way I can manage this is to work with other people who don't trigger this in me.

Let me give you an example...the real reason I'm writing all of this is to recognize someone who for me holds the key to my own effectiveness because they give me the slack I need to "rein" myself in, they don't just keep escalating me until I'm "sting the frog" and everybody drowns.

This morning, we're having what I call a passionate conversation and it's with people who are themselves passionate. For the most part, I just kept feeling like I had to fight for my baby...my idea. However, something happened during the conversation that REALLY made a difference. One of the people who I would consider one of the most emotionally intelligent people I've ever met, knew how to get from me what was needed, without triggering me further into the stinging mode.

When it "happened" it just completely deescalated my state. I've only known one other person in my life who had this ability...and the way they did it---just in case anyone wants to know---was to say, "I'm with you Mike." Then they proceeded to make their point. They could, like the others have continued to trade ideas, or cut me off, or worse given me those--you're not very emotionally intelligent looks--but even though no competition is meant by these people, they don't see that they are triggering the amygdale response in an "attached warrior" ...as a cascading affect.

From that point on, "I'm with you Mike," I began to find ways to deescalate my own tension and gradually I came back to consciousness. I had not known how "involved" I was or attached I was to my idea and I was beginning to fight for it, even though no fight was needed. I never said the unconscious state made any sense, and it doesn't but it's there, it's triggered and it's escalating.

This person, who I'll call Wendy, knew what she was doing in my view. She knew that to first side with me, would not only cause me to stop escalating, but then I would trigger my natural motivation to do better, to come to my senses and to begin to self-manage. That was all it took, just a simple "interruption" in the process, an acknowledgement from someone I believe in and know has mine as well as others best interests at hand. This is inspiring leadership, both a noun and a verb.

THIS is emotional intelligence.

Not me, but her knowing how to manage the emotions in herself and the emotions in others...a definition of emotional intelligence. Yet, by doing this, she allows me the opportunity for my own emotional intelligence training and desire

to be more emotionally intelligent to surface.

You see, little things make a real difference when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Sure, I continue to be frustrated about my own inability to self-manage and to be more self-aware and socially responsible for myself and the emotions and feelings of others, but emotional intelligence takes two! Just like, if people want warriors and need warriors, they need not emasculate them, but allow them to use those strengths and whatever else they can muster to contribute.

In my view, the true nature of collaboration has to be in design, not re-making everyone in their own image. This requires the application of emotional intelligence, but not from where you think...but around these high-value people who are rare and able to contribute in ways that in a lot of cases will be less than emotionally intelligent.

I hate to see what is happening in board rooms around the country as we whittle the legs off of stars through this seemingly required emasculation prompted by the holy grail—emotional intelligence.

What I think works is to create the kinds of design that are populated with people who can inspire leadership and through that process support higher intelligence, emotional or otherwise and learn that it takes two to tango.

Thanks Wendy, you're special, and I hope every warrior can find a Wendy to help them become more emotionally able to offer their gifts.

For those of you who want to read more about design and get help, my book CPR for the SOUL comes out in Jan, I hope you'll purchase a copy.

The countdown has begun: <http://www.cprforthesoul.com/countdown>

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