

Change Is Hard But Not Hard-Wired: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Executive Coaching

By Geraldine E. Grossman

I was recently invited to participate in an exciting partnership program initiated by our local Arts Council. The program was designed to pair executives of arts and cultural organizations with executive coaches for the purpose of developing their leadership skills. Twelve organizations were identified and matched up with executive coaches. The engagement was for six months.

The executive director assigned to me just took over a well-regarded and successful literary center known for its innovative and diverse programs. In recent months, due to a myriad of reasons, and not unlike other struggling not-for-profits, this organization's funding had been significantly cut. The most serious challenge this new executive director faced was sustaining the existence of the organization.

I look for several qualities in new clients. Do they care about their effectiveness? Are they willing to commit and will they be open to new behaviors that will significantly improve their success and their effectiveness? After several initial discussions with Jennifer (a pseudonym), I administered the ECI™ 360° feedback survey (Emotional Competence Inventory), which measures 18 emotional intelligence competencies.

Over the course of our work together, Jennifer developed many insights about her leadership strengths and about areas that she could improve upon. Having been an executive director in previous roles, Jennifer was already familiar with the benefits of receiving feedback from her colleagues, her manager, her clients and from her direct reports. Her strengths included artful interpersonal skills, transparency, optimism, self-confidence, service orientation, adaptability, self-awareness, empathy, and change management. Jennifer also learned that to effectively manage the organizational challenges she would need to enhance her proficiencies in personal influence, motivation, social expertness, and mastery of vision.

Jennifer introduced me to her team and described the coaching partnership. She was straightforward in describing her desire to be more effective in her leadership role and encouraged honest feedback on the survey. She involved her team in her developmental goals and she followed-up with her raters regularly by asking them how she was doing?

At the end of the program, the Arts Council invited feedback from the executive directors who participated in the coaching program and Jennifer's evaluation of her experience is as follows: "The coaching I received from Geri was invaluable. Getting 360-degree feedback from peers, supervisors, and direct reports allowed me to see how their view of me meshed with my view of my own performance and identify several concrete goals. Then rather than focus on 'feed-back,' Geri focused on 'feed-forward' and moved me into articulating my strengths, goals, and future vision in a way that was transformative and essential. This time with Geri continues to benefit me today."

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Change is hard, but not hard-wired. Jennifer invited me to meetings (internal and external) and I observed Jennifer honing her listening skills and mastering her vision for keeping this organization alive. She was artful in her communications when she had to cut staff and programs. She was brilliant in asking questions that helped bring out the best of her team's talents. While she was the ultimate decision maker, she invited the opinions and judgment of her board of directors, of other key stakeholders and of her staff. After many months of tough decision-making, Jennifer has earned a reputation for her integrity, her judgment and her leadership behaviors.

My work as an executive coach involves helping managers and leaders develop and enhance their proficiencies in emotional intelligence behaviors for high leverage impact. It long has been assumed that if you have a high IQ, achieve good grades, go to college, and demonstrate decent technical skills on the job, you were well on your way for personal, career and financial success. Yet we all know smart and clever people who have failed in their personal and professional lives.

Research conducted with Harvard MBAs over a 40-year span validates this. Many Harvard MBAs wind up being failures both in their careers and in their personal lives.

Until recently we had no language for this conundrum. Findings from success-related research at Yale indicate that Emotional Intelligence (EI) has more to do with success in life than IQ. A study conducted by Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* and *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, compares star performers with average ones in senior leadership positions. The results were astounding. Nearly 90% of the difference in their profiles was attributable to Emotional Intelligence (EI) not to IQ. Only 10% of technical skills and IQ combined determined success.

What is Emotional Intelligence and why are leaders all over the country engaging executive coaches to help them develop EI behaviors?

Goleman refers to Emotional Intelligence as, "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships."

There are four components of EI. (1) **Self-Awareness**: the ability to tune into one's own emotions and recognizing their impact; using "gut sense" to guide decisions. (2) **Self-Management**: the ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses under control and positively channeling one's feelings. (3) **Social Awareness**: the ability to be empathetic and to sense another's emotions; the ability to understand his or her perspective; and to take an active interest in their concerns. (4) **Relationship Management**: involves skills that inspire, influence and motivate others; the ability to develop others through feedback and guidance; the skill to resolve disagreements; and the ability to build bonds and create an environment of teamwork and cooperation.

I have been coaching leaders from all over the world for the past ten years using a 360° feedback process. This is a process in which a manager receives both quantitative and qualitative feedback from persons who have a degree of familiarity with her or his leadership behaviors. (i.e., direct reports, customers, peers, manager, others.) Leaders and managers who have had the benefit of feedback and coaching, when re-measured, all have achieved significant

improvements in their leadership behaviors. Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses is essential for leadership effectiveness.

Most of the leaders who engage my services are quite successful. They often express an interest in knowing their strengths and weaknesses and learning how they can leverage their strengths more effectively. One of the first questions I ask potential clients is, are you successful *in spite of yourself* or *because of yourself*? I help leaders to understand their successes *because of* themselves. This is a very powerful and transformational AHA moment for them.

Some common issues with successful leaders:

- Being Impatient
- Not letting other people finish a sentence
- Figuring out what other people have to say before they say it
- Trying to be right, vs. relational
- Not treating people with enough respect
- Coming across to people as arrogant or opinionated

Persons who are highly driven to succeed often experience something called “goal obsession”, which means they become so obsessed with achieving goals that they engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with the larger mission. (Goldsmith, *Secrets of a Leadership Coach*)

More and more corporations and academic institutions are listing EI competencies as criteria for selection, advancement, and retention. Likewise, leaders are realizing the importance of EI in preventing career derailment.

The following data provides evidence of the importance of EI in selection decisions, derailment behaviors and success factors:

Selection Decisions

National US Department of Labor Survey:

Corporations are increasingly listing emotional intelligence competencies as criteria for new hires.

Graduate Management Admissions Council Survey:

More companies are seeking MBAs with emotional intelligence.

Success Factors

Longitudinal studies of Harvard graduates and Foreign Service Officers found that test scores on entrance exams did not predict career success.

Hay McBer's study of hundreds of executives at 15 global organizations, including Pepsi, IBM, and Volvo, found that two thirds of the competencies deemed essential to success were emotional competencies.

Dan Goleman's analysis of 181 jobs in 121 organizations found that emotional competencies were the best differentiators between star performers and typical performers.

Derailment Characteristics

The Center for Creative Leadership conducted a study and found that rigidity; poor relationships and the inability to lead teams are the most common traits among leaders whose careers derail.

In conclusion, the good news is that EI is much less fixed than IQ and can be developed over time. Goleman refers to this as "maturity." Training, coaching and feedback can also substantially improve EI. Building one's EI can occur easier and faster when clients care, when they are willing to learn new behaviors that work and unlearn behaviors that don't work, and who are willing engage their stakeholders in their development plan.

Breakthroughs in brain research also show how leaders' moods and actions have enormous impact on those they lead. A leader's emotions can either energize or deflate an entire organization. Strong leaders make people feel good in bad times by helping them deal with negative emotions and by nourishing their positive ones so they can do what they have to do. (*Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman)

A leader's mood has the ability to inspire, arouse passion and enthusiasm and to keep people motivated and committed. Leaders who possess EI are adept at inducing desirable responses in others and are able to capture the "discretionary energy" of employees, which can impact the organization's performance as measured by revenues and profits.

"Emotional leadership is the spark that ignites a company's performance, creating a bonfire of success or a landscape of ashes." (*Primal Leadership*, Goleman). Research has shown that a critical mass of EI capabilities has significant benefits to the bottom line by as much as 28%. There is no question that there is a link between a company's success and the emotional intelligence of its leaders.

Gerri Grossman is President of **MY EXECUTIVE COACH**, a leadership development consultancy that specializes in helping leaders and managers develop Emotional Intelligence. She is an accredited user of the ECI™ 360° feedback instrument that assesses 18 emotional competencies corresponding with the EI model introduced in Daniel Goleman's **Working With Emotional Intelligence**. **MY EXECUTIVE COACH** has offices in Buffalo, New York and Asheville, North Carolina. For more information on MY EXECUTIVE COACH, visit www.myexecutivecoach.com or contact Gerri at gerri@myexecutivecoach.com.