

Characteristics of Emotionally Intelligent People

There is currently a lot of debate about the issue of emotional intelligence, especially in the way it applies to leadership and organizations. Researchers have developed instruments that can measure our Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ). It is also possible to assess entire companies in terms of how “emotionally intelligent” they are. This assessment looks for a specific type of organizational climate and the way the company is managed.

But is there any informal way of telling whether we or the people around us are emotionally intelligent? The answer is no, however, there are behavioural indicators that are usually manifested by people who have a fair degree of emotional intelligence. As you read through the ten items below think of the people you work with, especially those who have a leadership role within your organization. Also think about yourself, and try to answer this question.

To what extent do I and the people I work with possess these characteristics?

1. Aware of thoughts and feelings and their impact on behaviour.

Emotionally intelligent people tend to have a high level of self-awareness that enables them to know how they are reacting to the social and physical environment and how this is influencing their response. They can distinguish between issues they feel strongly about and possibly be hypersensitive to and issues that are relatively neutral to them. More important, they are aware of the tendency to project their own thoughts and feelings on to other people and are careful to distinguish between their own issues and those of others.

2. Aware of strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities and open to feedback from others.

Emotionally intelligent people are well in touch with their potential and do not play themselves down with a false sense of humility. They also know and accept that there are areas in their life where they need to develop, issues they need to resolve, and personal characteristics they need to work on. They are not afraid of being vulnerable because they accept that they have strengths and weaknesses. They have a sense of security that enables them to accept challenging feedback and encourage others to give them honest feedback about their work performance and how they come across interpersonally.

3. Able to contain intense negative or positive emotions without losing control.

Emotionally intelligent people are able to experience a full range of emotions including intense anger, frustration, hurt, joy, pleasure, etc. However, the behavioural manifestation of their emotions is moderated by an awareness of the consequences of their behaviour and a clear focus on what needs to be achieved. This is one of the more challenging characteristics of emotional

intelligence because while remaining natural and spontaneous emotionally intelligent people will harness their expression of what they are feeling and behave in a situationally appropriate and effective way.

4. Clear about values and principles that are consistent with actions.

Emotionally intelligent people usually show a high level of consistency between what they believe, what they say, and what they do. The alignment of these three elements reduces internal conflict and enables them to be clear about their decisions that are usually value or principle based. This results in honest and fair dealings with other people, avoiding the use of deception. Leaders who manage to be this way earn a high degree of respect, trust and credibility in organizations.

5. Proactive and persistent in achieving goals even in the face of setbacks.

Martin Luther King once said “The ultimate measure of a man (person) is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”. Emotionally intelligent people tend to recover from setbacks and regard them as inevitable. They use setbacks as an opportunity to grow and are open to new ideas and opportunities. Furthermore they take initiative in transforming a setback into something they can maximize in terms of learning for future decisions and actions.

6. Sensitive to other people’s feelings and able to offer constructive feedback.

One characteristic that really distinguishes emotionally intelligent people is their awareness and sensitivity to other people’s feelings. Rather than being oblivious to the emotional currents around them, they are tuned to them and use people’s emotional states as important information as to how best to interact and deal with them. When offering feedback, they do so in the most constructive way keeping foremost in their mind, the other person and what, how, and much he or she can take. This focus on the “other” and a willingness to serve gives them the ability to recognize other people’s needs and what motivates them, understand the human dynamics of the people around them, and work towards creating a secure emotional climate.

7. Promote other people’s success without feeling threatened.

One of the more challenging characteristics of emotionally intelligent people especially in leadership positions is the ability and willingness to promote other people’s advancement, celebrate their success without feeling threatened by their achievements. This characteristic shows a high level of maturity and security in a person. It is also an indicator that the person’s sense of worth is not based on their social status, economic situation, or educational level but on valuing themselves as unique persons.

8. Communicate openly, and are willing and able to listen to others.

On a skills level, emotionally intelligent people are effective at communicating openly and are particularly good at listening to others and empathizing with them. They regard conflict as an inevitable part of healthy working relationships that are based on honesty and are committed to resolving conflicts fairly. They are able to offer sound arguments in a non-threatening way that respects the others' point of view. Their arguing is not based on ridicule and domination of the other person but on sincere dialogue where diverse points of view are considered.

9. Capable of taking leading roles in work and family life.

Emotionally intelligent people seem to be naturally comfortable in leading and influencing roles. They are willing to share expertise and are constantly open to learning from others whatever their position in the organization. They regard change as positive and inevitable yet always maintain the value of continuity and preservation of what is effective.

10. Believe in the power of teams and the positive effect of synergy.

Emotionally intelligent people recognize how powerful teams can be when managed effectively. They are able to bring people together, cultivating positive relationships based on trust and cooperation. They invest time in this because they know that it is the ultimate strength that determines the health of an organization and as a result its success in achieving its objectives.

Although one cannot determine with empirical certainty whether people who possess the above ten characteristics have a high level of emotional intelligence, they are surely among the key indicators of an emotionally intelligent disposition. They can be used as a quick self-analysis regarding our own attitudes and behaviours and help us to identify areas for our ongoing development.

Patrick J. Psaila is a freelance psychologist working within various organizations for the past eight years after his training at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He is also a Licensed Practitioner of NLP from the Irish Institute of NLP in Dublin and a member of the Society of NLP. Patrick works with various large and medium sized organisations involved in manufacturing, education, health, tourism, banking, and other services as a trainer, HR consultant, and psychologist. His current area of specialization and interest is developing personal and professional development programmes for managers and leaders in organizations, focusing on importance of Emotional Intelligence in leadership. Besides his freelance work he is also a sessional lecturer and trainer with the University of Malta, the Malta Institute of Management and the Foundation for Human Resources Development. He can be contacted through his website at www.workassistmalta.com or on 7988 7982.