

Emotional intelligence *part II*

Tips to tap EI training



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IN THIS ARTICLE WE will identify some of the critical elements of an EI training program, explain their importance, and discuss their relationship to other training efforts.

Ideally, EI training will build upon other professional development opportunities offered to purchasing staff such as general negotiation techniques. One of the primary uses for EI skills is in negotiation and EI training is a natural next step to enhance critical skills already acquired through negotiation training. For instance, negotiation training teaches trainees to focus on issues rather than the individuals with whom they are negotiating; EI training shows the advantage of addressing the feelings that give rise to dispute rather than confronting the people or situations involved, or expressing frustration with the situations.

When selecting a suitable EI program, look beyond academic merit for a program with a clear connection to the commercial context in which purchasing professionals must operate. To maximize value, programs must be presented in practical, easy to understand terms, and directly relate to real world situations. Absent such a practical nexus, participants in a program may see EI as amounting to little more than new age mumbo jumbo.

Ask a prospective training provider to relate their program to the specific areas of concern discussed below.

Enhanced self-awareness is the first step in the development of EI. Trainees must have the ability to appreciate his or her internal emotional states and to identify its impact upon preferences, the use of resources, and perceptions. A person must first be able to manage the extent to which emotion controls one's responses to one's environment and to the others with whom one must deal. People with a high EI are not higher beings. They too feel anger, however, they use their anger to energize them into taking appropriate action – the problem giving rise to anger is seen as a challenge to overcome. More generally, training in EI should lead to an understanding of how to generate a positive value from a negative emotion. Once acquired, the second step in EI development is enhanced self-regulation.

Self-regulation is more than self-control (i.e. keeping disruptive behavior and similar inappropriate emotional responses under check). One goal of most EI training is to teach the distinction between thoughts and feelings. A thought is a rational response to a problem that indicates a possible method of dealing with that problem. Feelings contribute little more than confusion. Trainees must learn to take responsibility for and gain control over their feelings – to replace instinctive response with a thought process.

Self-regulation links with other aspects of professional training relating to taking responsibility for personal performance: adopting high standards of honesty and integrity, handling assignments responsibly in a flexible and appropriate manner, and being innovative in developing methods for dealing with problems. This aspect of training hopes to neutralize the tendency for staff to work as

automatons, capable only of obeying instructions (e.g. following policy) rather than being able to show initiative. It is important for any training program to be able to offer clear linkages to such wider personal development for any worker who receives training.

Trainees should learn how to appreciate how others will feel and to show respect for other people's feelings. Enhancing interpersonal skills not only helps improve relationships with suppliers and unsuccessful bidders, it also helps smooth the relationship of the purchasing department with client departments. The probable emotional responses of others to a particular problem must be incorporated into the management of that problem.

Generally, a full EI training program will focus on such areas as development of empathy and social skills. The former term describes both awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns, and a willingness to adjust one's own behavior in light of them. An empathetic person can sense others' feelings and appreciate their perspectives. In the purchasing context, an active interest in others enhances service orientation, particularly with respect to the ability to anticipate, recognize and meet customer needs. It also entails being able to explain client needs to suppliers so that they appreciate the performance standards that must be met when supplying to the customer. Of particular importance in the public context, empathy includes political awareness – the ability to anticipate the likely reaction of a constituency to events and occurrences.

EI training in social skills should build upon previous training in communication and conflict management. It should develop in the trainee the ability to exert a constructive influence on others (e.g. by providing a repertoire of effective persuasion tactics; and explaining how one may nurture a maturing relationship). The program should cover the strengths and weaknesses of competition, collaboration and cooperation, and the benefit to an organization of a concerted team effort. When a dispute arises, the aggrieved party will often tend to bark out commands, criticism, and to seek to take control of the situation. When both parties feel aggrieved, this tendency can be mutual. Whether or not both parties feel this way, only rarely will such behavior generate improved response on the other end. EI training should offer realistic alternatives.

EI training lays the foundation for further specialized training in motivational techniques, including coaching and leadership programs. The prospective trainer should be able to explain how the program information will relate to overall organizational strategy, and how participants will achieve at a high potential, and demonstrate drive, commitment and initiative in the performance of their day-to-day responsibilities. *www*

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