

Emotional Intelligence in Coaching

By Dr Angus McLeod

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has a good deal of press following the publication of the Daniel Goleman book that covers part of the subject. EI has been proposed as a rationale for coaching. So what can practising coaches learn from the discipline of EI?

Emotions are designed to take-over from logical thought under stress; these are mind-body states. Fortunately, people sometimes show an ability to over-ride the automatic emotional process. During an emotional event there is only a brief period of time in which a choice about rational control can be made; after this the limbic system of the brain has its way. The mechanisms by which this process happens are surprisingly well understood. The Reticular Activating System under the mid-brain plays a key part in matching feelings to past experience and outcomes. The Thalamus, Amygdala and Hippocampus are all implicated. Cross-talk between the logical (pre-frontal) lobes and the Amygdala determines whether logic or fight/flight response takes over. For this reason the expression 'Amygdala Hijack' describes events where emotions get the better of an individual, sometimes with dramatic results, as in road rage.

Dick Lewis of Q-OPD defines EI as:

'the ability to realise goals and find meaning in our lives by the skilful use of emotions as a powerful source of information, energy and influence'

Information about emotional factors is certainly critical in relation to decision-making and goal achievement. Motivation is sustained or broken by the emotional mirror behind our logical thought. The coach typically checks for motivation remotely by assessing congruence while the coachee talks about their goal. The coach may also seek information from the coachee about the degree of motivation they have about their goal. The simple device of asking 'on a scale of one to ten, how certain are you that you will attain this goal by that date?' as suggested by John Whitmore and others is helpful. The EI coach, however, looks very deliberately for emotional information.

Q-OPD use a model based on both EI and NLP. Dick Lewis and his colleagues work with the Bateson/Dilts logical levels model as a marker for congruence; this in the context of goals. They then add EI factors to rank the level of emotional intelligence thus:

1. Awareness of Own Emotions
2. Management of Emotions
3. Recognition of Emotions in others
4. Management of other's Emotions
5. Motivation

The EI coach looks to improve the coachee's understanding about their feelings and may well ask questions that mimic the physiological development of the brain's experience of an event. During an emotional response, information is often buried in the cross-talk between the logical and emotional brain. The questioning methodology

is designed to help the coachee be more conscious about the event and to extend their choice. Awareness is critical.

The brain's response (without the Amygdala Hijack) goes something like this:

1. Physical sensing
2. Energy and attention rising
3. Recognition of the emotion (typically sub-consciously)
4. Cognitive thought / intended action
5. Cognitive choosing / discrimination / alternative action

Modelling this to seek greater awareness, the EI coach might ask the following while the coachee re-experiences the event:

1. What is this feeling like?
2. Feeling like this, what is your instinctive compulsion?
3. What, if anything, is this experience hindering that is important to you?
4. And what is the key issue here?
5. An appropriate response to that key issue is?

In the context of goal setting the same type of model can be used to elicit emotional drivers for change. The coach checks for full awareness, compulsions, and relevance to goal and helps the coachee to explore other ways of experiencing and making choices. They then assist the coachee to find their own solutions with positive emotional motivation attached to them.

The whole issue of emotion in the coaching context raises the stake for coaches. Emotions determine motivation. The coach may check coachee congruence with defined goals but what will the coach do if the client's rating of success is still poor due to emotional factors? An option can be to diminish the goal. Another to work with the emotion and help the coachee to a more positive experience. This option is only available to those coaches who are qualified and experienced to do so. The coach who is uncomfortable with emotional expression is limited and may be helpless in certain situations. It is for this reason that Hogg Robinson Skillbase has a preference for coaches with counselling experience. In the Coaching Foundation we are also trying to develop ourselves, both in the tools we apply and by extending our logical and emotional intelligences. Coachees may develop and succeed by improving their EI during coaching. A high level of EI is clearly beneficial to the coach and their clients.

Angus McLeod, foremost Performance Coach, works from the UK and Philadelphia and is author of 'Me, Myself, My Team' (Crown House 2000., 2nd edition due in 2006). He co-formed the not-for-profit Coaching Foundation with Steve Breibart. Angus' latest book, on Performance Coaching, will be published by Crown House in the Spring of 2003. Contact Angus and the Foundation: ourinfo@angusmcleod.com . Q-OPD can be contacted on 01344 484 634.