

Work on Responding, Not Reacting

Much like empathy (which is a huge part of emotional intelligence), EQ is a skill you can develop if you work at it. Here are a few ways to do just that:

- 1. Take a moment.** If you don't take a second to analyze the situation and your instinctive emotion, you're more likely to react instead of respond. When you react, your emotions and instincts are often in the driver's seat. When you respond, your brain is in control (even if it means deciding to let your emotions lead). A deep breath can not only change your brain chemistry a bit, but it gives you a second to decide what to do next, instead of words or actions bursting out of you.
- 2. Reflect on your emotions and reactions.** Noticing that you tend to react in unproductive ways is the first step to controlling your emotions. For example, do you get defensive when you receive criticism? OK. You might not be able to change receiving the criticism, but you can change how you deal with the emotion that's involved with it. Just recognizing that you get defensive and asking yourself why can help you channel that counter-productive response.
- 3. Listen.** We have talked about the power of listening before. The more you listen, the more you can understand others and possibly what their emotional reactions are — and how to either avoid a certain reaction or how to cultivate a different one. This means taking the time to know your team. Really talk with them. All of this increases your social awareness and your team's group dynamic — how they behave both as individuals and as a group.
- 4. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and follow through.** In the above example, part of the ideal solution is that the team trusts you're going to address the issue. Sure, you said it, but if they don't think you're the type to follow through, they won't trust your response and their negative feelings will persist, none of which yield a positive, empathetic, productive work environment where your team can thrive and trust you to lead.
- 5. Be generous. Share the spotlight; call out success.** There's a scene in *Mad Men* where [Peggy is telling Don he never thanks her for her work. "That's what the money is for!"](#) That is not what the money is for. We all want to be recognized for good work. We're not all delivering diamonds every time, but getting recognized for good work or hard work, for extra efforts is powerfully motivating and it can make your team even more loyal to you. Very few teams rally around a leader who claims all the victories or doesn't bother to acknowledge the efforts of others. Additionally, those team members aren't likely to stay, especially talented and/or high potentials and performers. As a leader, it's not about you; it's about them.
- 6. Make feedback constructive.*** In *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Bradberry and Greaves note, "Some of the most challenging and most stressful situations people face are at work. Conflicts at work tend to fester when people passively avoid problems, because people lack the skills needed to initiate a direct, yet constructive conversation."¹ Most people don't enjoy being told their work or behavior isn't great. Feedback is meant to help an employee improve and get better, but it may come off as overly critical and demoralizing in some situations. Make sure that your feedback is clear and helpful. For example, "I don't like this example" doesn't help. By contrast, "This example is a little misleading. Could you find one that shows more of X, Y, and Z?" explains what the issue is and offers guidance on how to fix it. It helps to also include feedback on the things that work (but only if they DO work) to balance out what might be perceived as negative. On the opposite end of the spectrum, if you only give positive feedback, you're likely not helping your team improve and they may not trust that you're being genuine (most of us know our work isn't consistently perfect). See #4.
- 7. Admit when you're wrong or when you don't know the answer.** This goes a long, long way to being viewed as genuine. Most people can appreciate a person who tells them they don't know the answer but will get back to them (and actually does). Being able to admit you got something wrong shows humility and builds a tremendous amount of trust. Your team only works if you trust one other.

Emotional intelligence involves the process of evolving. Some people innately have many of these skills, but for those who don't, the skills are highly teachable and can be honed if practiced. In short, everyone can increase their emotional intelligence and thus their overall effectiveness and success.



¹ Bradberry, T. & Greaves, J. (2009). *Emotional intelligence 2.0*. TalentSmart. Page 21.