



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Why Emotional Intelligence is Overrated ***May 28, 2008***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we look at how the topic of emotional intelligence has blurred the definition of excellence in leadership.

It was the outsourced tech support call from hell. My Palm Treo was in some sort of technological twilight zone. It worked sporadically, and would crash frequently - a winning combination. On the other end of the phone, my ever-pleasant tech support guide walked me through his trouble-shooting question tree:

"Was I having a problem sync-ing my Treo?" (For those non-obsessive compulsive types who don't feel the need to check email at 3:30 a.m., "sync-ing" is a way to maintain identical records on both your computer and your hand-held device/phone.)

"No, I was not having a problem sync-ing my Treo."

About 15 yes/no questions later, with a few "do this" and "try that" thrown in:
"You now should be able to sync your Treo."

"But that was never my problem."

Always ready to provide excellent customer service, my ever-empathic tech support "partner" (service providers always want to "partner" with you) apologized and began to start down another 15-question trouble-shooting tree.

I didn't know whether to scream, cry, or laugh.

Obviously, some company had invested serious dollars in training their tech support people in being empathic, in being "emotionally intelligent". The problem was, notwithstanding that they were emotionally intelligent, they were technologically incompetent.

The same problem is true in leadership.

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After Daniel Goleman published "Emotional Intelligence", it was difficult to read anything on leadership without getting the impression that you couldn't be a real leader if you weren't emotionally intelligent. In fact it got so extreme that emotional intelligence became the sine qua non for leadership. Throw in a few studies showing that the number one reason for executive leadership failure (thought not necessarily middle management failure) is the lack of emotional intelligence, and you'd be forgiven for pursuing your inner child as part of your personal development plan. And the trend continues today, 13 years after the publication of Goleman's book.

Now don't get me wrong. No one likes to work for a jerk. But that being said, people like to work for a winner too. They want to work for a successful leader. But for some reason, emotional intelligence has blurred the line between the "what" of leadership and the "how" of leadership, as if they were the same thing.

From where I stand and from what I see in companies, the major concern and priority today is developing the basic skills and capabilities of new leaders, not their emotional intelligence (think Maslow's hierarchy). And rightly so. In a time when many experienced leaders are being replaced by those who have only a fraction of their expertise, companies with limited budgets should focus on fundamental skills and capabilities first, then on emotional intelligence. First and foremost, leaders need to get the job done. I'm not saying they can do so by being unethical or insensitive. But job one is the ability to get it done.

If you can get the job done, and you lack emotional intelligence, we'll work on the latter. If you're great with people, but you don't get the job done, your career is very limited...unless you want to fix my Treo.

You can access this and previous issues of our 60-Second Email™ newsletter via the following link to our website: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

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