



LEVERAGING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE LEADERSHIP OF A LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

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In the eight years since the publication of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence*,² there have been well over 70 additional books published on the subject. In addition, the topic has since been the focus of hundreds of articles, as well as countless seminars and workshops.

Further, an internet search of the term "emotional intelligence" currently yields anywhere from 50,000 to 135,000 hits, depending upon the search engine utilized. But why all of the "buzz" over emotional intelligence? And more importantly, how might this concept apply to the running of a legal services program? The fact of the matter is, emotional intelligence has been suggested to positively influence organizational effectiveness in a variety of areas including (but not limited to) the following:

- Employee recruitment and retention
- Teamwork
- Employee commitment, morale, and health
- Productivity
- Efficiency
- Client outcomes

Many of these areas in which emotional intelligence is suggested to influence organizational effectiveness are particularly relevant to legal services programs. Employee recruitment and retention, for instance, can be especially challenging in the legal services area due to the fact that the salaries paid to those working for a

legal services program are often considerably lower than the salaries paid to those working in private firms, other non-profit organizations, or in federal, state and local government positions.³ The challenges may extend beyond recruitment and retention, however, into additional areas such as employee commitment, productivity, and ultimately client outcomes. Given the potential existence of these challenges, and the fact that emotional intelligence has been suggested to favorably influence each of these areas, the ability to demonstrate emotional intelligence in the leadership of a legal services program can quite possibly have a noticeable impact on the effectiveness of that program.

Emotional Intelligence Defined

Emotional intelligence, succinctly defined, is the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and others.⁴ And, if the good news is that emotional intelligence leads to favorable individual and organizational outcomes, then the even better news is that unlike cognitive intelligence (as measured by the familiar intelligence quotient or IQ), emotional intelligence can actually be developed. The latest development in the articulation of a model of emotional intelligence is presented by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, authors of the recent best seller *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Value of Emotional Intelligence*.⁵ Their model suggests a framework organized into four clusters of competencies, where emotional competence is defined as "a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work."⁶ The first of these clusters is *self-awareness*, the capacity for understanding one's emotions, as well as one's strengths and weaknesses. Moving beyond awareness, the second cluster of competencies, *self-management*, represents the capacity to also effectively manage or control one's emotions and behavior. Together, due to their inward focus, these first two clusters comprise what has been labeled as an individual's *Personal Competence*. The third and fourth

<i>Emotional Intelligence: Leadership Competencies</i> (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002)	
Personal Competence	Social Competence
<p><i>Self-Awareness:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional self-awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence <p><i>Self-management:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-control Transparency Adaptability Achievement Initiative 	<p><i>Social Awareness:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy Organizational awareness Service <p><i>Relationship Management:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspiration Influence Developing others Change catalyst Conflict management Teamwork and collaboration

domains of emotional intelligence competencies represent a progression into the realm of *Social Competence*, which includes *social awareness*, the capacity to understand and to be attuned to the emotions of other individuals or groups of individuals, and *relationship management*, the capacity to induce desirable responses in others. The specific emotional intelligence competencies associated with each of these clusters are presented in the figure above.

Emotional Intelligence and Work Performance

Research has shown that it is these emotional intelligence competencies (as opposed to technical skills and purely cognitive abilities) that most often separate outstanding from average performers. This is especially true of those in leadership positions, as well as those in professional fields such as medicine or law where entrance exams, stringent course requirements, and certification exams establish fairly high threshold levels of cognitive ability and technical skill.⁷ Taking the field of law as an example, the basic argument is that since most individuals in the profession have a certain threshold level of technical skills and cognitive intelligence, these items fail to serve as useful predictors of outstanding versus average performance within the field. This is due to the fact that individuals who successfully enter and complete law school, pass the bar exam, and subsequently begin practicing law, find themselves in a pool of individuals of comparable intellect all falling at the high end of the IQ range. Given that there is no specified emotional intelligence threshold to enter the profession, however, there is a broader distribution of emotional intelligence competencies

across that same pool of individuals. Thus, in situations such as this, emotional intelligence becomes a potentially more powerful predictor of outstanding performance than cognitive intelligence.⁸

Emotional intelligence also serves to distinguish between outstanding and mediocre leaders. In the case of leadership, an emotionally intelligent leader is one who is able to create *resonance* with others in the organization. Resonant leadership entails being in sync with others, tapping into their passions and enthusiasm, and driving their emotions in a positive direction toward the achievement of group and/or organizational objectives.⁹ A resonant leader is able to sustain his or her effectiveness even when forced to make difficult and inevitably unpopular decisions (e.g., reducing staff size or freezing salaries due to funding cuts). A prime illustration of this is the case of a CEO of a large bank in the Midwestern United States who exhibits many of the emotional intelligence leadership competencies and could be described as a resonant leader. Even after he had announced plans for a fairly significant layoff, he retained the respect and admiration of the company’s employees. One employee in particular, despite learning that his job had been eliminated, continued to display a photograph of the CEO in his cubicle, still referring to him as his “inspiration.”¹⁰

At the opposite end of the spectrum from resonant leaders are leaders who instead create dissonance. Rather than driving emotions positively, dissonant leaders create negative emotions such as anger, fear, or apathy. Whereas individuals working in an environment characterized as resonant are likely to feel empowered, enthusiastic, and engaged, those working in a dissonant

environment are more likely to feel defensive, dispirited, and stressed out.

The fortunate thing about positive emotions (and the unfortunate thing about negative emotions) is that they are extremely contagious. And leaders, more so than any others in an organization, play an instrumental role in the spreading of these emotions, be they pos-

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itive or negative. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee discuss the contagion of those in leadership positions, offering that leaders tend to be watched and listened to more carefully than others in a group or organization. As a result, leaders establish emotional cues that are picked up by others, thus setting the emotional standard for the group.¹¹ When negative emotions spread throughout the organization the environment can be described as toxic. Further, this toxicity is not necessarily confined to the organization and its members. Instead, it can spread to employees' personal lives, as well as to client relationships. Research has shown, for instance, that employee attitudes toward their organization influence their behavior toward customers, which in turn influences customer perceptions regarding the quality of their interaction with the employee and the organization.¹² All of this suggests that the emotional tone set by the leader of a legal services program may have far reaching impact, influencing not only the program staff, but potentially program clients as well.

The Development of Emotional Intelligence

How then does one become an emotionally intelligent leader? As was previously suggested, emotional intelligence can be learned or developed. Richard Boyatzis, co-author of *Primal Leadership* and Chair of the department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management, offers evidence of this development in his reporting of a series of longitudinal studies conducted at the Weatherhead School. Boyatzis and his colleagues found that, over a two to five year period, individuals

who completed a competency-based MBA program were able to significantly increase multiple competencies suggested to comprise emotional intelligence.¹³ This is not to suggest that one need attend a competency-based MBA program to develop their emotional intelligence, but instead that a targeted approach aimed at developing emotional intelligence competencies can yield favorable results.

At the core of Boyatzis' research on the development of emotional intelligence is his model of self-directed learning, which has benefited from over three decades of work with a variety of colleagues in the area of leadership development. Boyatzis describes self-directed learning as a process of "intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or who you want to be, or both."¹⁴ In its most recent form, this model of self-directed learning is suggested to involve five stages or "discoveries" that serve as enablers of individual growth and development.¹⁵

According to the model, the first discovery involves uncovering your *ideal self*, or who you really want to be. This is followed by the second discovery which entails assessing your *real self* (who you are today), as well as identifying the areas of overlap and the areas where gaps exist between the ideal and real selves. The third discovery involves the creation of a learning plan or agenda designed to build upon one's strengths (areas of overlap between the ideal self and the real self) while reducing any identified gaps. After creating a learning agenda, the next step is to begin experimenting with and practicing new behaviors aimed at developing the desired competencies. This represents the fourth discovery. Finally, the fifth discovery, which may actually occur throughout the entire process, involves developing trusting and supportive relationships that can facilitate your process of growth and development.

As an organizational leader, engaging in this process of self-directed learning can help you build your emotional intelligence leadership competencies. You can also assist others in the organization in building their emotional intelligence by helping them engage in their own process of self-directed learning.

Developing an Emotionally Intelligent Organization

While up to this point, emotional intelligence has been discussed strictly as a property of individuals, it should be noted that groups may also display emotional intelligence. Moreover, a group's emotional intelligence is more than just the sum of the emotional intelligence of its members. Group emotional intelligence is more

complex due to the fact that groups have to deal with emotions on many levels (e.g., individual group members, the group as a whole, and other groups and individuals outside of the group's boundaries). In their 2001 *Harvard Business Review* article entitled, "Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups," Vanessa Druskat and Steven Wolff describe a process by which groups develop emotional intelligence and how that ultimately translates into effective group performance.¹⁶ A comprehensive discussion of this process is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth mentioning that the leader of a group can play a key role in this development process through his or her influence on whether norms emerge within the group that create awareness of emotions, as well as whether norms emerge that help regulate emotions. Druskat and Wolff suggest that these emotionally intelligent group norms lead to the creation of trust, group identity (a feeling among group members that they belong to a unique and worthwhile group), and group efficacy (the belief that the team can perform well and that group members are more effective working together than apart). This in turn leads to greater participation, cooperation, and collaboration among group members, which ultimately leads to more effective group performance.

Conclusion

In sum, as the leader of a legal services program, you can conceivably leverage emotional intelligence in a variety of ways in order to potentially enhance the effectiveness of your organization (as measured by employee performance, satisfaction, and commitment, as well as client satisfaction). First, you can work to develop your emotional intelligence leadership competencies in an effort to more favorably influence others (individually or collectively) through the creation of a resonant organizational environment. Second, by introducing others in your organization to the self-directed learning model, you can assist them in their own development of emotional intelligence, thus further increasing the likelihood that resonant relationships among employees will be created and maintained throughout the organization. And finally, by being aware of and engaging in the types of behaviors that foster an environment where emotionally intelligent group norms are likely to emerge, you can set the stage for the development of trust, group identity, and group efficacy, which have been suggested to lead to more effective group performance.

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- 15 For a detailed discussion of Boyatzis' theory of self-directed learning see chapters six and seven of *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (see footnote 5).
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