

# Lawyers Need Emotional Intelligence

By Steven C. Lindberg



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Lawyers, who are we? Most of us think that we have a fairly high intellect. We have studied the law and we argue cases and we solve our clients' problems. We feel relatively confident in our profession, but are we? Do we have all the tools to be successful? Do we have the tools to be the leaders of our firm? Do we have emotional intelligence?

What is emotional intelligence? The authors who initiated the seminal empirical study of emotional intelligence have defined it as:

Emotional intelligence is the set of abilities that accounts for how people's emotional reports vary in their accuracy and how the more accurate understanding of emotion leads to better problem solving in an individual's emotional life. More formally, we define emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion and regulate emotion in the self and others. (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000)

One leading researcher in the field of psychology has argued that emotional intelligence is twice as important as compared to technical skills and IQ as ingredients of excellent performance. (Goleman, *What Makes a Leader?*, 2004) Goleman was surveying leaders and the successful skills that successful leaders possess. We, as lawyers, are

leaders. We lead our office staff and our junior associates. We interact with opposing counsel and judges. We try cases and have to speak to juries. We have conversations and meetings with our clients. All of these encounters are social. All of these encounters need emotional intelligence if we are to succeed in our business.

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Here is an excerpt from a recent article entitled, "The Power of Emotional Intelligence":

Have you ever wondered why some financial advisors and branch managers are considered star performers by their firms and clients alike, while other who appear just as knowledgeable and committed, do not experience the same level of success?

In fact, we are not judged solely on how knowledgeable we are, or by our training and expertise. Greater weight is being placed on how well we handle ourselves and understand others. (Federer, 2011)

This is true in our profession of law. A judge, a jury, an opposing attorney, a mentor, a leader and even a client will judge us not only by our technical expertise but how well we handle ourselves and others. This is the essence of emotional intelligence. As Goleman has stated, "... emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership." (Goleman, *What Makes a Leader?*, 2004) Think about the people we meet daily and how we react to them and they to us. In our profession we find many other attorneys who are courteous. However, we have all come across those "Rambo" attorneys or the attorneys who are gruff and not willing to talk. These individuals lack emotional intelligence. It is very important that we have these skills so we are not perceived as one of them.

There are five components of emotional intelligence. They are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill. *Self-awareness* has the ability to recognize and understand mood, emotions and drives as well as their effect on others. This is shown by self-confidence, realistic self assessment and self-deprecating sense of humor. *Self-regulation* is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and to think before acting. This is shown by trustworthiness and integrity and openness to change. *Motivation* is a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money

or status and to pursue goals with energy and persistence. This is shown by a drive to achieve, optimism and organizational commitment. *Empathy* is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and to have the skill in treating them according to their emotional reactions. This is exemplified with the expertise in retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity and service to clients. *Social skill* is the proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. This is shown in leading change, being persuasive and leading teams. (Goleman, *What Makes a Leader?*, 2004)

Emotional intelligence can be learned. It is not like IQ which is something that you are born with. As we continue to age, the circuitry in our brains becomes very defined.

Improving an emotional intelligence competence takes months, rather than days, because the emotional centers of the brain are involved — not just the neocortex, the thinking brain where technical skills and purely cognitive abilities are learned. As we've mentioned before, the neocortex learns very quickly, even on a first hearing. But the basal ganglia and its links to the emotional centers learn differently: To master a new skill, they need repetition and practice. (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 2002)

That is why it is hard to learn new habits because the brain wants to us the existing circuitry and does not want to create new ones. In order to break bad habits you have to create new habits and that consists of new circuitry. This will only happen if you practice and then harden the new way of doing things. This is

true of losing weight, exercising or dealing with you emotional intelligence, it takes practice.

There are several sites where you can download an assessment of your emotional intelligence. I would recommend Goleman's assessment since he is the foremost expert in this field. His site is: [http://www.haygroup.com/leadershipandtalentondemand/ourproducts/item\\_details.aspx?itemid=58&type=1](http://www.haygroup.com/leadershipandtalentondemand/ourproducts/item_details.aspx?itemid=58&type=1)

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Once you take one of these surveys, you can better identify what are(s) you need to improve upon. It is clear though that you will need to practice.

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2004) It should be clear that the knowledge that we have as lawyers about the law will only take us so far in our careers or in managing our law offices. We need more if we are to move forward. We need to learn these skills to be able to communicate more effectively with all of those we come into contact with daily. We need these skills if we are to increase our clientele. We need to be able to handle support staff and make our offices, our departments and our organizations more productive.

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