

## **Emotional Maturity: A critical framework for leading with emotional intelligence**

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The concept of emotional competence deals with one of the oldest and most trusted cornerstones of business: the interpersonal relationships that form between co-workers.

A focus on human and emotional competence is necessary, not because people have forgotten how to make relationships work, but because the conditions in which we work and live put a disruptive pressure on relationships. In these times of persistent and tumultuous change, it is of critical importance to revisit one of the foundations of business – forming collaborative relationships.

In the pages that follow, I will highlight some of the conditions that contribute to our current state, the principles of emotional competence, as well as specific behaviors and principles that are proven to increase emotional maturity and competence.

### **The Climate of Business**

We live in a material world. An objective observation of our behavior and focus shows that consumer orientation, along with a production and acquisition mentality, drive our economy and culture. So, it may come as a surprise to learn that, in study after study, money is NOT the most important criteria in the minds of American workers. In fact, money is not even cited as one of the top five reasons for unhappiness in the workplace or for why employees leave companies.

A recent study of 118 organizations in different industries showed that an employee's relationship with his or her supervisor or manager and work-life balance are the most important determinants for staying with an organization.

The top factors affecting an employee's decision to stay or leave are:

- Quality of relationship with supervisor or manager
- Ability to balance work and home life
- Amount of meaningful work—the feeling of making a difference
- Level of cooperation with coworkers
- Level of trust in the workplace
- Compensation
- Level of opportunity for advancement and skills growth

Compensation, the amount of money they are paid, is sixth out of seven in order of job priority! The real reasons why workers leave is that they are not personally connected to their leaders, they are not appreciated, they are not involved in clear

communications, and they feel that they cannot grow and develop within the organization.

On the path to creating loyal, engaged, and accountable teams, managers must demonstrate understanding and communicate effectively. They need to set direction and rapport, and facilitate growth and development in their people. These are the very goals of emotional competence, and a compelling driver to engage in learning and applying emotional intelligence.

Emotional maturity and competence begins with personal commitment and experience, grows to include business and work, and expands to touch community and society. Because the "global village and marketplace" is changing, working relationships are more complex, customs and behaviors are more varied, and the need for skilled application of emotional intelligence is ever more critical for success.

Yet the case for emotional competence goes beyond the changing climate of business; it is important because of its power to improve results. Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competence – especially difficulty in handling change, not being able to work well in a team, and poor interpersonal relations.

Furthermore, a study of 130 executives found that how well people handled their own emotions determined how much people around them preferred to deal with them.

Emotional competence touches all levels of organization. At L’Oreal, sales agents selected on the basis of certain emotional competencies significantly outsold salespeople selected using the company’s old selection procedure. On an annual basis, salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence sold \$91,370 more than other salespeople did, for a net revenue increase of \$2,558,360. Salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence also had 63% less turnover during the first year than those selected in the typical way.

The powerful economic engine driving the realities of production and trade is also producing a social wake, an impact that is affecting the lives of all who are involved in the global market. Maturity implies stability and strength. In fact, mature means fully developed and perfected, one who possesses maximum vigor and efficiency of action. The call for emotionally mature people and leaders who can remain calm and focused in the midst of all tumult has never been greater.

Economies and societies churn at an unprecedented pace and the demands of survival, let alone success, are enormous. Here are some of the changes that call for the necessity of emotional maturity and competence:

- **Multi national corporations.** Multinationals often bring together multicultural teams as varied as Mexico, India, Ireland, and USA to work together. The cultural differences must be understood, accounted for, and managed in order to have high performing teams. Successful team leaders must possess the awareness and the skills to facilitate the exchange of resources through the filters and barriers of culture.
- **Female workers.** There are more women in the workforce than ever before, and they bring new skill and new requirements. Many new business trends can be traced to female influence - from fashion and style trends in office settings and architecture, to the rise of more inclusive and participative management approaches and teamwork.
- **Workers have a stronger voice.** Workforce exploitation is unacceptable. In the new economy workers expect fair wages and conditions and are vigilant about civil rights and the use of legal avenues.

- **International media.** Scrutiny of workplaces and workforces shapes the opinions of the purchasing public. Companies must be aware of ‘good-will’ and manage their image as much as their product.

The businesses that thrive in these times of change and stress are the ones that are able to adapt to the current environment and, moreover, are able to leverage the environment for continued growth.

Tight knit and frequent international trade has introduced other changes as well. The spread of democracy and human rights, and a growing expectation of comfort and wealth – once the domain of the privileged few – are being embraced and sought out by every culture that is trading within the global market.

Leadership by force, by authority, and through powerful hierarchy is slipping before the forces of capitalism, democracy, and equality. In a more integrated and collaborative business environment, leaders must develop the emotional skills required to succeed. They must learn new skills so that they may continue to influence, motivate, and direct their organizations toward success and growth.

So let’s look at emotional maturity and competence and how these principles turn into functional workplace practices.

***Emotional Competence Defined:***

*Emotional competence is a capacity for awareness and management of motives, beliefs, and behaviors in oneself and in others. Additionally, it is the ability to develop and sustain empowering relationships that lead to effectively and efficiently achieving goals. Simply put, emotional competence is the ability to accomplish the right things quickly and easily while caring for and developing everyone who’s involved.*

**The Path to Emotional Maturity**

Emotional maturity arises from emotional competence, which is achieved from focusing on two areas: personal mastery and interpersonal mastery.

We will explore emotional competence in the area of personal and interpersonal mastery by examining several aspects of each realm. While the following competencies are some of the reasons American Express and the US Airforce achieve extraordinary results, each organization must assess its own emotional competence, and learn how to use it to its competitive advantage.

### **Personal mastery:**

Maturity and emotional competence are evident in our behavior, interaction, and decision making under stress. This external, visible evidence is the result of invisible, internal choices that we make in our minds and hearts. Personal mastery is the result of self awareness, motivation and confidence, and is developed with accountability, discipline, and experimentation.

### **Self Awareness**

The first requirement for any change is a thorough awareness of the current situation and conditions. If I want to improve my health, I first need to know what kind of shape I'm in, what I'm doing that is not healthful, and what other choices exist. Similarly, if I want to improve how I function at work, I need to know what I'm doing that is helpful or harmful, and what other options and choices exist. This is the process of awareness.

The beginning of mastery is an honest and sober self-assessment - an awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses. There are two avenues that lead to awareness - a passive one and an active one. Passive assessment begins with a research mentality. The subject is self and observation is the objective. How do I interact, what do I say, what is my attitude, what are the hot buttons that make me angry?

The research continues by exploring emotions. What makes me angry, what makes me happy? How does my emotional state affect my interactions and my work? What is the connection between what I feel, say, and do? What are my values, what guides my decisions? In passive observation, I take notes and then reflect on my findings and assess myself.

The active avenue involves interaction and feedback from others. By being open to candid

feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning, and self-development, I can address the questions above with the help of peers, managers, friends, and professional coaches and mentors.

In achieving emotional maturity and competence, it is important to understand the difference between self-assessment and self-criticism. Self-assessment is an honest evaluation of one's skills and limitations. It is an ongoing review of strengths and deficits. Self-criticism is nothing more than internalized violence. Emotional competence is based upon honest awareness. Yet competent people do not beat themselves up. By assessing rather than criticizing, they can make the necessary changes for improvement and growth. Honest and courageous assessment is a practice that nurtures long term, growth-oriented personal development.

### **Self motivation**

Competent individuals are constantly learning, just as the organizations that thrive and succeed are learning organizations.

In addition to assessing themselves honestly, emotionally mature and competent people are able to direct and motivate themselves. They are results-oriented, and are driven to meet and exceed their goals and objectives. While they can be extrinsically motivated by rewards and recognition, they are intrinsically motivated by a need to excel and achieve. They are always exploring new territory of learning and doing, which in turn provides them continuous opportunity for self awareness and evaluation.

Those who find ways to do better and learn how to improve their performance grow in their certainty and strength and are more able to be tolerant and patient. In a word, competence cultivates confidence.

### **Self Confidence**

A result of honest self-awareness and a drive to achieve and learn is increased self-confidence. Emotionally competent people are confident not just for what they have done, for a fixed self-image, but for their willingness to learn and grow.

Self-confidence is a certainty about one's self-worth and capabilities. Self-confident people present themselves with self-assurance; they have "presence."

Emotionally competent, mature, and confident workers voice their views even when they are unpopular; they stand by their convictions and challenge a team toward accuracy, fairness, and achievement. Confident team members who offer differing views and opinions are opening the doors of possibility. They need to be encouraged, not repressed.

Confidence allows one to be decisive and to make sound decisions in the face of uncertainties and pressures. Self-confidence also promotes optimism - the ability to persevere on a chosen path of action in spite of obstacles and setbacks. Confidence and optimism focus one's mind on hope of success rather than fear of failure. Confidence turns setbacks into learning, and shortfalls into areas for improvement.

Confidence is not acquired like mastery of HTML or freeway driving. Confidence grows with meeting challenging goals and being self aware and honest. Keep in mind that confidence is a critical element of emotional maturity, and that it is the fruit of the labor of other skills, especially accountability and openness, which follow.

### **Accountability**

Being accountable arises from an awareness of cause and effect. Events in an organization – in life – are an endless chain of interconnected links, each link connected to its neighbors before and after. Everything has an event or force that generates it and every action has a consequence. Living accountably is not a moral judgment of reward and punishment. It is a natural law that events and actions are interconnected.

An accountable person knows that he bears responsibility for his position and life, and takes responsibility for his actions. He recognizes the effect of his thoughts and choices on his actions, and the effect his actions have on the perception of him by others. Action and reaction; cause and effect. I may not have the power to control a situation, an effect, but I can control my reaction, which will determine the next effect.

Most of us can't control the circumstances of life, but we CAN control our response to circumstances. I may not have the power to prevent a layoff, but how I respond, how I behave after the fact will determine my attitude and behavior in future job interviews and how quickly I'll be reemployed.

An accountable person chooses responding over reacting; makes conscious choices rather than habit driven reflexes. If I act with anger, people will back away from me and be hostile and aggressive. If I act with kindness and patience people will seek me out and be supportive of me.

But perhaps the most important aspect of accountability comes from being counted on, being reliable. An accountable person says what he will do and does what he said. Being accountable gives rise to trust. When I am true to my word, my self-confidence soars and others trust me. Think of all the times people have failed to live up to their commitment and how you became suspicious of their sincerity and dependability. Think of the times you have fallen short of your own commitments either to yourself or to others, and how you lost faith in your ability to take on new tasks and challenges.

An accountable person learns to seriously consider what he commits to. We often agree to do things for reasons that aren't genuine. We may want to impress, or can't say no, or feel obligated, or guilty, or perhaps we chronically underestimate how long a task will take. Whatever the reason, we say yes to commitments that we immediately know we can't live up to. Mature behavior involves thinking more deeply about what we commit to and obligating ourselves to those things which we are willing to be accountable.

The final point to make about accountability and cause and effect is the importance of relationship and community. Emotionally competent people are aware of their interactions with others. We each have an impact on every person that we encounter. To support excellence, we must connect with people and support, nurture, and be honest with them in helping their ongoing assessment and learning.

## **Discipline**

Emotionally mature people are consistent and disciplined - disciplined of mind, emotions, actions, and choices. Discipline is a tool for managing disruptive emotions and impulses; staying composed, positive, and unflappable even in trying moments, and thinking clearly and in a focused way under pressure.

Discipline distinguishes between motivation and consistency. Many managers seek support because they need motivation, or because their team needs motivation (in truth, a team that needs motivation is a reflection of the leader lacking in motivation). If we only perform when we are motivated, then our performance will vary in accordance with our motivation. Motivation waxes and wanes; we need to get re-ignited regularly, and it only lasts for a while.

Deliberateness and discipline are ongoing. We approach our efforts consistently, whether we're excited about it or not. It isn't necessary to be excited in order to be excellent; it is necessary to be consistent.

We like to do activities that we are good at. We are motivated to do things that are pleasant. Activities that we are good at are pleasant to do. Discipline means sticking to the learning curve of an activity until we become good enough at it to enjoy it and be motivated by it.

Deliberateness and discipline are internal drives. They are personal intention rather than external motivation. External pressures that force action – the threat of punishment or the promise of reward – are effective in the short term. Emotionally mature people possess a long term perspective and are disciplined, motivated, and focused in relation to clear goals and intentions.

Goals define a direction for us, and they provide a way to marshal our energies and resources. With clearly defined goals we create a method for decision-making and choices. We can choose how to respond to circumstances, opportunities, or challenges by answering the question, "is the action I'm about to take bringing me closer to or further away from my goal?"

Discipline is furthered by being mindful – focusing attention on the immediacy of a task at hand. While open mindedness is one side of maturity, focus is the other. Mindfulness is the ability to be focused, attentive, mentally engaged – what I call unitasking. Multitasking is the enemy of mindfulness. Disciplined people do well because they can narrow their attention and bring to bear their vast resources of intellectual and emotional ability. Mediocre performers dissipate their energy, are distracted and distractible, lose their point and their focus, and waste energy getting back on track.

The ability to unitask, to redirect the wandering attention, is powerful practice for overcoming disruptive emotional and ego needs and hungers. By seeing our hungers – for safety, control, relationship, recognition, or creative expression – we can become more honest, more empowered, more humble, and more effective.

By being aware and alert, observing reality as it is rather than from the perspective of our desires and needs, we become aware of a fundamental truth about life – everything constantly changes. We become aware of the cycles and seasons in life - in nature, in relationship, in business, in personal energy. By being mindful of cycles, we align ourselves with rather than fight the natural cycles of life.

## **Experimentation**

Emotionally competent individuals are students of life. Emotional maturity and open mindedness allows us to see things as they are, and attempt to do things differently, to take risk. Because emotional strength provides a foundation for courage, strong individuals are willing to step out of their comfort zone and travel in the risk zone. It is fear that prevents risk-taking. Being mindful, accountable, disciplined, and confident, as discussed previously, promote strength and experimentation with change.

Experiments don't succeed or fail; they teach us. In the place of failure, there is feedback. When we are students and willing to learn, we are willing to take a risk, to make a leap of faith in the direction of a hunch or an exploration, or toward a goal.

Openness and curiosity also provide comfort with novel ideas and new information. This allows us to seek out fresh ideas from various sources and to assimilate new learning into life and work.

In the competitive and fast moving world of business, the ability to entertain original solutions to problems and generate new ideas makes emotionally competent individuals invaluable. In fact, experimental thinking and curiosity form the foundation for innovation and growth.

Finally, a curious, open, innovative person is open to coaching – open to improvement oriented guidance. Because we often find it difficult to be completely aware of our abilities, limitations, and blind spots, it is critical to have relationships that provide us with objective feedback. Emotional maturity does not happen in a vacuum; it is an evolving experience that directly involves others. Emotional competence begins with an ever evolving self-awareness, and is deepened through coaching and continuously engaging with mentors and teachers.

### **Interpersonal Mastery:**

The evolution of emotional competence and maturity begins within as personal mastery. But its value shines through in how well it is applied externally, within relationships - in the realm of interpersonal mastery. The next part of our discussion looks at the foundations of interpersonal mastery: openness, communication, trustworthiness, and mentoring.

### **Openness and Humility**

What marks a person as being emotionally mature? A mature person is hard to offend. Why? Because he is open and humble. And how does one become open? Through remaining curious and employing the Beginners Mind. Beginner Mind is a state of constant learning and examination; an attitude and outlook of a student – curious, inquiring, fascinated, observing.

A false notion of maturity is one in which our knowledge and experience adds up to a “I know everything” mentality. There is a word for closed minded, arrogant people who are set in their ways and unwilling to grow, explore, and change - psychosclerosis. Arteriosclerosis is the hardening of the arteries, and psychosclerosis is the

hardening of the mind. Curiosity is the remedy for psychosclerosis; it is a commitment to looking deeply and seeking out the Truth always.

By being open-minded, we are less judgmental and critical of new possibilities; we learn to “think outside the box.” By being less judging and more accepting of self we become less critical of others. And so the chain continues; as we practice acceptance of others we accept self more and do it more easily with others, and on and on.

It is our ego, our sense of separate self, that has impulses of being safe, being right, being accepted. Sometimes these impulses get in the way of what is true and real. Emotionally competent and strong people find that it is more important to be real than to be right. By being curious we can remain an observer, a student. We are less likely to enforce our opinions, and more likely to continuously grow and improve.

Openness emerges from an understanding that life is not black and white; it is plays of shadows and grays. It is recognition that paradox is far more the norm than the exception. For many, uncovering a paradox is an invitation to stop and figure it out before going on. This is not maturity. Accepting the paradox and working with it is the work of emotional competence. Life is a paradox to be lived, not a riddle to be solved. Mature, competent and confident people are willing to live in paradox, and less frightened and limited by it.

We regularly experience love and anger, pleasure and pain, relief and stress, excitement and anxiety. Push and pull coexist and do not need to be resolved before action can continue. Whether we are changing jobs, a department, or a relationship, the push pull paradox arises. Competent individuals learn to experience the paradox, persevere in their course, and figure it out as they go along, not from the sidelines of inactivity.

### **Communication**

Communication forms the first step of interpersonal mastery. Communication bring out into public an exchange of ideas and information. Mature and competent people communicate effectively; they send clear and convincing messages, are effective in give-and-take, and register emotional cues in attuning their message.

Furthermore, they deal with difficult issues straightforwardly.

One of the strengths of mature communicators is that they listen well and welcome sharing of information fully. Stephen Covey, in his book "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," encourages people to "seek first to understand and then to be understood." This is the way that mature people interact. They seek mutual understanding, foster open communication, and stay receptive to bad news as well as good

It serves us to place the discussion about communication in the realm of every day business. In customer service, is it more important to be a good sender of information or receiver? For customer service providers, is it more critical to listen or to speak? Is there an art to being a good listener? Does it come naturally?

Most people learn early on how to speak, but many forget how to listen well. In fact, there is research that indicates that we hear half of what is said, listen to half of what we hear, understand half of it, believe half of that, and remember only half of that. Did you get that??

This means that in an eight-hour work day,

- You spend about 4 hours listening.
- You hear about 2 hours worth.
- You actually listen to 1 hour's worth.
- You understand 30 minutes of that hour.
- You believe only 15 minutes worth; and
- You remember just under 8 minutes worth.

In his book "In Search of Excellence," Tom Peters says, "Good listeners get out from behind their desk to where the customers are." Good listeners use their mindfulness and focus to get out from behind their desk and give full attention to the people with whom they are talking, regardless of who they are.

The art of communication - listening, and speaking – also forms the building blocks for collaboration and teamwork. Teams work well together when the members can relate to one another. Emotionally competent individuals are able to extend themselves, reach out, and collaborate well together with others in the pursuit of goals and growth.

Emotionally competent people use their effective communication and outreach to manage conflict and change; they negotiate and resolve disagreements. They handle difficult people and tense situations with diplomacy and tact, but more importantly they can spot potential conflict, bring disagreements into the open, and help deescalate it before it grows.

There are a variety of personality traits that differentiate people. Some are logical and others emotional, some are outgoing while others are shy, some are spontaneous while others are structured. But we all have to work together. Emotionally competent adults recognize differences and, when situations arise that bring differences into conflict, they have tools to maintain the collaboration and the communication.

How can we overcome the effects of language and culture on communication and collaboration? It requires that we really develop personal mastery competencies. Whenever I've worked overseas or with multinational teams, self-awareness, openness and humility, and discipline have been my best tools for staying connected, patient, and collaborative. I'd recommend the same to anyone who works with different languages and cultures.

### **Trustworthiness**

Being competent is rooted in being honest and trusted. Being competent also produces trustworthiness by maintaining standards of honesty and integrity. Trustworthy people act ethically because they have thought deeply and have determined their code of conduct, not because they are afraid of retribution or legal consequence.

Because they are willing and able to admit their own mistakes and confront unethical actions in others, mature people are trusted. Their reliability and authenticity builds trust in them and they are looked towards for leadership.

Trustworthiness is developed through taking tough, principled stands even if they are unpopular, and through learning to be focused and present; dealing with each situation with full attention and sincerity.

## **Mentoring**

The final element to discuss in the evolution of emotional competence from interpersonal mastery is mentoring – the ability to sense what others need in order to develop, and to bolster their abilities.

Mentoring is often thought of as a leadership duty, but it is not limited to leaders. It is a feature of emotional competence.

People who choose to live as mentors acknowledge and reward people's strengths, accomplishments, and development. They engage people and provide them feedback that both builds their confidence and maturity and identifies people's needs for development.

At the beginning of this discussion, we defined mature as one who is fully developed and perfected, one who possesses maximum vigor

and efficiency of action. Having the attitude of a mentor is an exercise in maturity and competence. Giving timely coaching, and offering assignments that challenge and grow a person's skills can be done at any level of relationship, if it is done appropriately.

A mentoring standpoint deepens one's ability to sense others' feelings and perspective, and take an active interest in their concerns; in a word, empathy. Mature and competent people are attentive to emotional cues and, as we discussed previously, listen well. Listening well is far more than simply concentrating on words; it involves showing sensitivity and understanding others' perspectives and being able to assimilate their needs and concerns. Then, from a place of understanding and clarity, an empathetic individual can help out based on understanding other people's needs and feelings.

## **Conclusion**

We have discussed the principles of human and emotional competence as they develop from personal and interpersonal mastery. Many ideas and tools have been explored, but perhaps they can be summed up this way. Human competence involves an open, aware, and honest willingness to grow and improve. This, in turn, yields confidence and focus, which bring about relationships grounded in caring, attention, and empathy.

There is an important thread that binds together awareness, accountability, openness, communication, and collaboration; a sense of humor. Not having to be funny, but being able to laugh at oneself. Those who are emotionally strong learn to take themselves less seriously and more lightly. My father had a plaque in his office that said "don't take your life too seriously; you're not going to survive it anyway."

It may well be that in order for the other skills to be fully acquired, we must be able to laugh at ourselves. For in lessening the seriousness of our condition, we open the door to honesty and to real, lasting change.

I have talked about maturity and competence. While some of the ideas are familiar, others may be new or have new twists. I urge you to remember at least one important point: growth, maturity, and competence is the result of action, not theory. I invite you to pick one or all of these ideas and practice them. Then discover for yourself the positive impact on business and revenues as well as the social and personal satisfaction of living a full and open human life.

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