



Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations: Making Training in Emotional Intelligence Effective

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By Cary Cherniss and Mitchel Adlet, Issue: August, 2000, ASTD

We have all known people who are gifted leaders--in history, among our peers, and throughout literature, journalism, and drama. Were they born knowing how to inspire, to guide, to coach, to be adaptable, to make tough decisions palatable? Or did they learn something from a parent, a teacher, or a mentor that can be taught? How does their understanding of their own and others' emotions help them succeed?

In the past several years, a number of social scientists have begun to explore what is now known as emotional intelligence. In their new book, *Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations: Making Training in Emotional Intelligence Effective*, Cary Cherniss and Mitchel Adler define emotional intelligence as "the ability to accurately identify and understand one's own emotional reactions and those of others. It also involves the ability to regulate one's emotions, to use them to make good decisions, and to act effectively." They go on to say that "emotional intelligence is the basis for personal qualities such as realistic self-confidence, personal integrity, knowledge of personal strengths and weaknesses, resilience in times of change or adversity, self-motivation, perseverance, and the knack for getting along well with others."

In exploring how organizations can help their employees gain insight into EI, the authors address these two questions: How can adults become more emotionally intelligent? and What are the most effective strategies for helping them do so?

In search of the answers to those questions, Cherniss and Adler formed the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, which was funded by the Fetzer consortium. Over a period of two years, with the help of researchers from academia, the government, the corporate world, and a leading consulting firm, the authors sought to determine what organizations can do to promote emotional intelligence among their employees.

Daniel Goleman, author of the best-selling *Emotional Intelligence*, wrote the preface to Cherniss and Adler's book. In it, he says, "The best-practice guidelines [suggested in this book] are based on an exhaustive review of how people actually change and learn in the domain of soft skills...making a business case for the importance of emotional intelligence development at all levels in an organization, particularly for leadership."

The good news is that emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically or set irrevocably in early childhood. In fact, as people grow older they seem to develop greater EI. Additional good news comes from the realm of neuroscientists who have proven that our brains remain plastic (capable of creating new connections and growing) throughout our lives. Although people are not born with Goleman's five dimensions of EI--self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills--those traits can be learned throughout life.

Cherniss and Adler make a persuasive argument that the increasingly global nature of business, the growing reliance on technical innovation, and rapid downsizing have created an organizational need for employees who are capable of interacting smartly--not only with their fellow workers, but also with a greater variety of customers.

After explaining the elements of emotional intelligence, using a number of case studies from their research on more than a dozen model programs, the authors outline a series of steps that organizations can use to improve the emotional competence of their employees.

Cherniss and Adler readily admit that replacing one behavior with another is hard work and is neither smooth nor linear. The biological basis for this difficult switch is because "automatic habits of dealing with thought, feeling, and action become the brain's default option: What a person does automatically and spontaneously often with little or no awareness that a menu of possible responses is available." They go on to point out that "emotional learning requires modification of the circuitry in the emotional parts of the brain. Changing habits is more challenging than...adding new information to old."

In succeeding chapters, the authors outline a detailed step-by-step model for promoting EI-based learning in work organizations. In phase 1, they establish a set of guidelines for introducing social and emotional learning into an organization while securing organizational buy-in. Phase 2 involves preparing for change and establishing organizational needs, setting clear, meaningful, manageable goals, making learning self-directed, and building positive expectations. The change process occurs in phase 3, in which the actual training and development takes place. In that phase, Cherniss and Adler outline such devices as fostering a positive relationship between the trainer and learner, encouraging experiential learning, giving feedback, and helping employees defend against the common and expected setbacks. Finally, in phase 4, the authors give examples of ways in which the organization can encourage, maintain, and evaluate change.

That last phase is one in which Cherniss and Adler find that organizations are the weakest. They point out that fads in EI will continue, especially in soft-skills training, until rigorous evaluation becomes common practice. Although it's not always easy to evaluate EI-based training programs, it is now possible to do with much greater rigor and precision. By evaluating programs in terms of return-on-investment as an integral part of the process, EI training programs will gradually become more effective--and accepted.

Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations: Making Training in Emotional Intelligence Effective provides an outline and a number of proven strategies for organizations, large and small, that want to improve the emotional intelligence of their entire staffs.

