



HOW EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IMPACTS YOUR FIRM

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Understanding what is rattling around in the lawyer brain has been an area of fascination and study for me for over three decades. It started when I heard a presentation by one of the founders of this area of study: Dr. Larry Richard, J.D. (www.lawyerbrain.com). Discovering that the vast majority of lawyers have distinctive personality traits which set them apart from the general populace was a game changer.

I am currently halfway through re-reading a recent publication of the American Bar Association: *Beyond Smart Lawyering – Lawyering with Emotional Intelligence* by Ronda Muir (www.lawpeopleblog.com). Muir, like Richard, is what I lovingly refer to as a recovering attorney — one who has moved on to another career focused on helping attorneys work and live more successfully.

To date I have written two articles including some insights on emotional intelligence (EQ). *Conducting a More Successful Interview* appeared in the *PA Bar News* in January 2018. *Are You In Control of Your Actions?* appeared in the *PA Bar News* in June 2018. (PBA **members** may request a copy by sending an email request including the article title to lawpractice@pabar.org.) I also created and have presented a seminar entitled “Managing Conflict and Strengthening Resilience” at many county bars in the past three years. The seminar included a brief introduction about the impact of EQ.

The response to the articles and especially the seminar has been very strong. Attorneys have suggested that many things that previously mystified them became amazingly clear, thanks to some understanding of EQ. Keep in mind that other industries have not only known about EQ for decades, but have been successfully modifying hiring, training, promotions and even group dynamics based on this understanding. Typically, lawyers trail behind.

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Having validated the importance of teaching attorneys to understand EQ, it became clear I had to widen my educational reach. As a result, on July 31, 2019, I presented the opening session “How Emotional Intelligence Links to Ethical Compliance and Success” at the PBA Solo & Small Firm Section Conference. It took three years from when I first proposed to present this topic to achieve my goal. But based on the feedback following the session, the Genie is finally out of the bottle, and will not be put back.

It is my hope that I will be able to present this seminar in every county. Yep, it’s that important to so many aspects of law firm and personal life. Talk to your bar’s executive director or CLE person about bringing me to your county.

At the conference, I paced a bit at the podium while watching the ballroom seats fill. Normally calm before presenting, I was a bit jittery this time. The unknown was how lawyers would receive a message about some of their colleagues — maybe themselves — having low emotional intelligence, pointing out all the areas of daily law firm life that were impacted, driving points home with war stories and making inexplicable past events suddenly clear to those in the audience.

At several points during the presentation I made eye contact with someone who was having that “aha” moment. I knew I was getting through, irrevocably getting the importance of EQ onto the radar screen of those in the audience. From ethical transgressions to poor business decisions to hiring and even elevating the wrong people, EQ combined with the distinct lawyer personality profile — what I lovingly refer to as the lawyer DNA — provided the “missing link” in understanding how and why things happened or failed to happen.

The audience came alive when I opened the floor to questions. It wasn’t a question of whether this “soft stuff” was real. It was a question of how to understand it, manage it, improve it and provide better outcomes.

Is there some way to determine whether someone is low or high EQ?

Yes. There are personality tests such as Myers-Briggs and DISC. To get started researching what is available, start your search using <https://tinyurl.com/PBA-EQTest>. A test will reveal strengths and weaknesses of the test-taker in a myriad of areas which are determinants of success.

How do I get tested?

There are some tests which are free and online. Although some may be a brand name, it is not the full assessment tool. They are not as complete or comprehensive as those administered by an industrial psychologist or coach. Plus, the test result in and of itself is not capable of suggesting methods to improve weak areas. Of course, Richards and Muir are top names and readily available in

Pennsylvania. I can also recommend other coaches experienced in testing and working with lawyers and law firms to PBA members.

Are there interview questions I can ask to find out whether there might be higher or lower EQ in candidates?

Absolutely. PBA members can contact me for samples of behavioral interview questions they can use, as well as a “best practice” hiring protocol. These two items will vastly improve your batting average on hiring successfully. Non-members can find information online, including names of coaches. Be sure you select one with experience in the legal industry.

My session opened with a tip of the hat to Muir and Richards. It closed with a business card drawing for a copy of Muir’s book. No one budged until they found out if they were the winner. Throughout that day and through the next two days of the conference, participants kept commenting on how fascinating and informative this subject was. Most quietly shared an experience which they now understood was explained by EQ. Experiences spanned the gamut from the best leader or mentor, to the ideal lateral who was a nightmare in reality, from firms ripped asunder by warring personalities, bankrupted by incredibly poor business decisions, to those sued for malpractice or caught up in the disciplinary process. The best news I can deliver is that EQ can be significantly improved in anyone who is willing.

A version of this article originally appeared in the August 26, 2019 issue of the Pennsylvania Bar News.

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