

EQ 360 Builds Success, Prevents Derailment

- Marcia Hughes & James Terrell

Whether caused by blind spots, habits, or lack of awareness, failure to recognize how others experience the way we engage is a key contributor to leadership derailment. When we don't notice that we lose people's attention because we talk too long or we scare folks away by being too demanding, we miss vital information. Instead of recognizing the responses and making strategic changes the head in the sand leader keeps on keeping on right into a diminished career. So how can this be prevented? After all it is challenging to accurately discern how others are responding, and even harder to know what triggered particular responses from peers, direct reports or others.

A client we'll call Melinda found an answer. She kept her job and is much happier now thanks to her working carefully with her EQ 360 results. She heads a key program as senior vice president for a high profile non-profit. She managed a department in charge of launching new programs and convincing key investors to fund her organization's programs. Her staff needed to be inspired and to receive detailed overviews on expectations and expected ways to engage in order to demonstrate the organizational mission. She did this well. However, when she reported up to the high profile board of community leaders, Melinda had lost so much credibility that the CEO thought he was going to have to let her go. The board wanted big picture, quick and strategic feedback yet Melinda was giving them long winded analytical analysis that bored most and angered some.

The CEO wanted to keep Melinda but wasn't sure he could. We used the EQ 360 to help her recognize her specific challenges and learn ways to change her habitual way of engaging. Board members, her boss, peers and direct reports all rated her and the results were included by each category so she could see who was perceiving success and where specifically people were struggling with her engagement. She needed to enhance her awareness of how she communicated to different groups and modify her approach accordingly. Key EI skills she needed to sharpen were her:

- Reality Testing (by expanding her political savvy and paying attention to how to communicate instead of habitually engaging with the same style with everyone)
- Emotional Self-Awareness by recognizing that when she felt worried, she gave detailed explanations and further lost the Board.



- Assertiveness by fine tuning her listening skills so she could be more effective with her assertiveness. Melinda didn't have any problem speaking up, but she too often wasn't strategic in how she spoke.
- Optimism by recognizing that when she started her 360 work she was feeling defensive and less than sure that she could make the changes and that was aggravating her didactic habits. If she could trust in her many skills and tap into her flexibility, Melinda could make changes more effectively.

EQ 360 Assessment

The EQ 360 is an assessment in which an individual rates his or her own skills and others who know him or her in a variety of ways also answer the same questions. The results graphically show how the individual perceives his or her skills in each of the 16 EI skills measured by the EQi and then presents a comparison to how others see those same skills. The results are shown by the different rater groups of boss, direct reports, peers, family/friends or others, such as clients. The overall goal is to accurately understand one's skills and how they are expressed and to have a similar perspective between the individual and the raters. However, it is quite likely that there will be differences, and it's possible the differences will vary between rater groups. For example, the boss may be in agreement with the individual, the direct reports may rate him or her higher and the peers may have lower ratings in some areas. The raters' responses are reported with three or more to a group, except for those of the boss. That confidentiality supports candor.

Value from a 360

The EQ 360 provides the opportunity for gaining considerable value. How much is actually gained depends most on the attitude and willingness of the individual. The capabilities of the coach and support from the boss and organization also make a difference. The potential value of a 360 assessment used in the workplace can come from:

- The opportunity for everyone to be more reflective: The individual receives considerable data that invites introspection and reflective awareness. Raters are asked to take about twenty minutes to answer the questions and that causes them to shift from day to day tasks and think about how the individual engages



and displays skills. Hopefully, the rater takes some time to reflect on what part of the engagement they are responsible for as well. It is a two way street! And finally if you have a leadership group each having their own 360 and then meeting to discuss what they have learned and opportunities, the invitation for deepening the reflective awareness is large.

- Light is shined on blind spots: This is probably the best recognized value of the 360 by organizations. We can easily move along in our lives thinking we're doing fine while totally missing the mark with our direct reports, for example, and be incredibly wrong. Melinda found that not only did she have a problem with the Board but that she had taken so little time to engage with her peers that they didn't know her well. This resulted in mediocre ratings from them. Coaching discussions helped her realize the value of working with her peers to herself and the organization. This reframed "I don't have time for lunch with Jose" to "I can't afford to miss lunch with Jose." The blind spots can also be about behaviors. Melinda may think she has great stress tolerance skills, but family/friends might report they miss her and are worried about her health because she works so much. Direct reports might reflect she has low stress tolerance because they experience the anxiety that taking a new project on creates, and they are often given much of the work. The resulting resentment from staff brings on a handful of other challenges.
- Balancing skills to build congruence. This is one of the most important benefits of the EQ 360. The 16 skills reflect important information on their own, but no skill is an island. Every skill is more powerful when exercised in context of highly related EI skills. For example, the effectiveness of assertiveness is tied to skills in empathy, impulse control and optimism. For more information see Marcia's article on [The Four Corners of Empathic Assertiveness](#).
- Rater group congruence: If direct reports, peers, the boss and others have considerably different views of an individual's performance, it's a problem. Success in an organization is a multi-dimensional endeavor. The 360 points out problem areas and supports strategic focus in building relationships.
- Horizons are broadened when the leader takes time to look at feedback from people he or she works with regularly, consider the information carefully and prepare a focused response.



The EQ 360 should always be used for the right purpose, which is for individual growth and it requires a trained coach who will help sort through the information and guide the person in their growth process. Most importantly, the individual needs to bring a willing attitude to the process. Willingness to learn and make a few strategic changes can result in phenomenal career benefits. It did for Melinda. She expanded her mindfulness, carefully prepared for Board meetings and practiced how to respond at the level they expected. She built relationships with her peers and found they had much to share and she enjoyed her work more because of the valuable relationships. Melinda's boss expects her to be a vital part of the workforce for a very long time.