

## **From Exile to the Boardroom**

- James Terrell

For most of corporate history our emotions have been banished from the workplace. Today we tend to think that was because they were inefficient and allowed for too many uncertainties and potential disruptions. Yes and No.

As the new mechanical tools and technologies of industrialization began to revolutionize the human experience of work some 250 years ago, our social values underwent a similar revolution. The need to locate factories near rivers began to concentrate increasingly large populations in cities. The need to coordinate large numbers of people working on independent tasks required a new emphasis on speed and discipline.

Patterns of social behavior which had sustained and empowered us since our hunter-gatherer days now proved to be getting in the way. Traditional group think strategies for collectively solving whole problems disrupted factory work where individuals in relative isolation devoted their efforts to producing fragments of the whole. Here the collaborative decision making strategies and closely woven patterns of social relationships that were necessary to integrate extended families into a village system merely got in the way.

In order to conquer work it was divided up into isolated tasks and new patterns of behavior were demanded. The time required to develop group buy-in and honor each person for the value of their individual contribution was seen as unnecessary and a waste of time. Consequently those who could work the most independently from the social context became the favored elite.

Now after 250 plus years of this experience, we are realizing that in breaking our bonds with the land and each other we lost crucial increments of sensitivity, and perspective, and appreciation for the natural dynamics that help us maintain harmony. These "natural dynamics" have recently been rediscovered and revived under the name of Emotional Intelligence, and not a moment too soon! The levels of alienation, internal competition, and stress in our postmodern organizations have become the biggest drag on our productivity.

Organizations such as the US Air Force and American Express have saved millions of dollars by educating their people, and training them in the skills of Emotional Intelligence. It turns out we can only go so far without the the ability to demonstrate authentic respect for one another. Now to progress any further, we must reincorporate our feelings.

Fortunately, it turns out that isn't nearly as scary as we thought it would be. True, we will never be able to predict and control emotional responses in the same way that we can control the output of a machine, but that's a good thing! By increasing our emotional intelligence through training and personal coaching we can dramatically increase our ability to influence, motivate, and inspire the people we work with.

In one case, a leader with Director level responsibilities took the EQ-i® measure and discovered two of her lowest scores were in Self Regard, and Assertiveness. She was highly intelligent and had Independence, Empathy and Flexibility among her highest scores. She was succeeding by carefully discerning what her leaders were seeking to accomplish, then independently she developed a highly creative solution. When she presented it, if she encountered any push-back she flexibly retreated, quickly and gracefully and incorporated the feedback into her next iteration.



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The problem was that because of her low Self Regard and Assertiveness, her organization was being short changed of her true level of competency! Over the next four months of coaching we worked on specific ways to increase her understanding and appreciation of what she was feeling, i.e. her Emotional Self Awareness. As she began to appreciate how her feelings were intuitively guiding her decisions and problem solving strategies and became more consciously aware of them, she began to feel much more confident (i.e. Self Regard), and was thus able to assert her viewpoint much more effectively with her superiors.

When she retook the measure approximately a year later, as a result of mainly developing her Emotional Self Awareness, she had made very significant progress in Self Regard, Assertiveness, Self Actualization, and Happiness... and she was being considered for a position as Vice President!