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Emotional Intelligence Trumps Your GPA

Gage Poulson

High expectations and intense pressure conditions us to believe that good grades and praise from professors indicate that we are on the road to success. As adolescents we learn that our peers who cannot keep up in school or attain a high GPA are destined for failure. Society teaches that grades determine your identity and capabilities. Supposedly, grades equate to intelligence.

But what does it mean to be *intelligent*? We yearn to be the best, to be the wisest, to be the smartest. In the past decade, research regarding intelligence — specifically emotional intelligence — has grown exponentially. Unfortunately, while a shift in research has occurred, societal expectations linger.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is “the ability to understand, assess, express, and regulate emotion and knowledge related to emotions” and is vital to human success.¹ While success is commonly measured by our GPA, our ACT scores, and how many high-level courses we can manage, emotional intelligence is measured by the ability to motivate oneself, control impulses, regulate moods, empathize, and hope.²

Goleman, a science journalist and emotional behavior expert, argues that “if your emotional abilities aren’t in hand, if you don’t have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can’t have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.”³ Luckily, unlike other intelligence factors, scholars believe that emotional intelligence increases with age and can be improved upon with effort.

The key to emotional intelligence lies in “self-awareness.”⁴ When an individual can pause and recognize which emotion is contributing to a certain thought or action, they are demonstrating emotional intelligence. Take the following scenario: Amanda and Jack are competing for the same promotion. When Amanda is promoted, Jack immediately begins to talk poorly of her to other co-workers and simultaneously begins to slow down on his own work. If Jack were to become self-aware and acknowledge that his feelings of jealousy are contributing to his lack of emotional control and lack of motivation, he would be able to take a step back and link his emotions to his poor reaction. He could then take a step back, regain control of his emotions, and act appropriately in the situation.

As we become more self-aware, we can better understand and control our emotions and actions. It seems easy, but if it were that simple, the world would be full of self-aware, emotionally competent people. Unfortunately, when we consider our classmates, family members, co-workers, and other acquaintances, we know that this is not the case. We should become more self-aware and dedicate more time and effort to becoming our best selves.

How do we measure our own emotional intelligence? Many have encountered roadblocks when attempting to analyze such a qualitative concept. While several tests do exist, the Harvard Business Review suggests a 360-degree assessment in order to increase our self-awareness.⁵ A

360-degree review encourages an individual to receive well-rounded feedback from supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and other partners with the intention of receiving a receiving more well-rounded feedback.⁶ By accepting critical feedback from ourselves and others, we more accurately prepare ourselves to analyze our thoughts and actions.

In the workplace, we seek out real people who we can relate to and from relationships with. Some factors that contribute to our perception of others and our ability to maintain these relationships include both IQ and emotional intelligence. However, studies show that “emotional intelligence adds far more of the qualities that make us more fully human.”⁷ Intangible strengths, such as relationship building and discernment of others’ emotions are better indicators of genuineness.

It may seem insignificant or even irrelevant to consider emotional intelligence as a key indicator of success for jobs that require a hard skill set. Individuals who are not emotionally mature and the able to handle their emotions make harsh decisions without considering the consequences. Goleman argues that “the emotional brain responds to an event more quickly than the thinking brain.”⁸ Although educated individuals have learned to think logically, without high emotional intelligence, they may overlook knowledge and resort to demonstrating unsettled feelings and uncontrolled emotions.

On the other hand, extremely competent individuals who relate well to others and have several hard skills that would benefit the business world are often overlooked and discouraged due to an overwhelming emphasis on grades and test scores. Recently, emotional intelligence is becoming increasingly more evident in the hiring process. Recruiters recognize that “EI plays a crucial role in facilitating the well-being and desired work behaviors in the workplace.”⁹

Employers recognize that no statistical correlation exists between academic success and emotional intelligence scores.¹⁰ However, studies do indicate that emotional intelligence positively influences employees.

Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment positively have a strong positive correlation with emotional intelligence, suggesting that emotionally intelligent people feel greater satisfaction with and demonstrate greater loyalty to their work, increasing job performance.¹¹ In an attempt to hire motivated, loyal, and committed people, employers should prioritize emotional intelligence when making decisions.

Why do we constantly nag others and feel pressure to solely develop tangible strengths? We are accustomed to determining potential based off of how well someone can perform in an academic setting, but the business world is not an academic setting. Business consists of people, strategy, relationships, and creativity.

We cannot merely dismiss those who excel academically and demonstrate hard work and dedication, but, academic achievement should not be the sole motivating factor or indicator of a successful employee. We need a balance between emotional intelligence and current benchmarks of intelligence.

We should better prepare the future investment bankers, the future accountants, and the future businessmen and women to be more successful in the workplace by increasing the emphasis on emotional intelligence and eliminating the tunnel vision on relatively insignificant indicators of success like GPA.

What does it truly mean to be intelligent? While success is commonly measured by our GPA, our ACT scores, and how many high-level courses we can manage, emotional intelligence is measured by the ability to motivate oneself, control impulses, regulate moods, empathize, and

hope. In this article we explore how emotional intelligence should be valued equally, if not more, than academic achievement within the business world.

¹ Putranto, Nur Arief Rahmatsyah, Shimaditya Nuraeni, Aurik Gustomo, and Achmad Ghazali. "The Relationship between Cultural Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, and Student Performance." *International Journal of Business* 23, no. 1 (Winter, 2018): 17-25.

² Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. Bantam Books, 2006.

³ Goleman

⁴ Goleman

⁵ Boyatzis, Richard E, and Daniel Goleman. "Emotional Intelligence Has 12 Elements. Which Do You Need to Work On?" *Harvard Business Review*. Harvard Business School Publishing, December 5, 2017.

⁶ Boyatzis

⁷ Goleman

⁸ Goleman

⁹ Nanda, Mahima, and Gurpreet Randhawa. 2019. "Emotional Intelligence, Well-Being, and Employee Behavior: A Proposed Model." *Journal of Management Research* (09725814) 19 (3): 157–72.

¹⁰ Iannucci, Brian A. "Emotional Intelligence: A Quantitative Study of the Relationship among Academic Success Factors and Emotional Intelligence." Order No. 3572646, Northcentral University, 2013.

¹¹ Nanda and Randhawa