

“WOMEN AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE”

BY

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Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you read the title correctly: it says 'Women and Emotional Intelligence', not 'Women and emotions'. Just checking!

The term Emotional Intelligence is only a few years old. It was coined by Daniel Goleman, who wrote the pioneering book on the subject. He actually co-authored it with his wife, Tara, triggered by sitting through many frustrating business meetings with her, particularly of boards they both sat on.

He was only too aware that for some reason they weren't working well. But it was his wife who was able to tune in to the emotional currents beneath the surface of those meetings and identify the ones that diverted the group's focus and energy, keeping them from getting their business done.

So how do we define Emotional Intelligence? Here's one attempt, by Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf, in their excellent book called *Executive EQ*. (Let me explain here that EQ stands for Emotional Quotient, Just like IQ stands for Intelligence Quotient. For people have devised ways of measuring EQ just like they have for IQ.)

It is the ability, Cooper and Sawaf say, to sense, understand and effectively apply emotions as a source of human energy, information, connection and influence.

Let me try and put it more simply, and addressing Golding's original concern head on: when we display high EQ we are able to manoeuvre through human interactions in such a way that good things happen for all concerned. Not just for you, at someone's expense, but for everyone.

That's why I've put that 'win-win' tag at the bottom. No one ever said that going for win-win was easy, but that's what high EQ people aim at.

Now let me ask a question: do women have higher EQ than men? Well Mr. Golding had to rely on his wife's insights. Maybe he wasn't that unusual. And if not, what might the explanation be?

Take a look at this slide. Here I try and explain why it wouldn't be unreasonable to expect women to have had to develop higher EQ than men, simply in order to survive. We have to manage without bulging biceps and in the absence of holding positions of authority, whether in the family or beyond. And we have had to become masters, or mistresses, of multi-tasking, involving all the emotional strength which that requires.

A key requirement for a high-EQ person is excellent self-knowledge. And haven't we found that the more powerful someone becomes, the more they risk getting out of touch with who they really are and how they come across? And what do powerful people have in common? Most of them are men! As people become more powerful, those around them increasingly tell them what they want to hear. The powerful *think* they're in touch. They *imagine* their EQ is high. But it is not.

In today's organisations, life is highly disciplined. Managers have done everything possible to make life rational and predictable, with strategies and plans, structures and systems, procedures and rules. And of course information technology has greatly enabled this approach. No room for emotions here.

Then, when we enter today's organisations we enter a man's world, or to put it more precisely, a macho world. It is a world where we focus ruthlessly on tasks. We're always in such a rush that there's simply 'no time' to worry about the people who perform the tasks. And because life is desperately competitive, we're perpetually aiming to get one up on our colleagues – which we are deliberately encouraged to do so by incentive schemes that reward individuals rather than teams.

In this rat race if I win, I do so at your expense. There ain't room for the two of us on the winner's podium. Little wonder that the environment encourages us to work ever-longer hours, fly ever more miles to attend ever more meetings. And then of course we expect to swap tales of our heroic exploits over a few beers.

No emotions here either. Just hard guys doing hard things. Hard guys like Arnie 'the Governator' of California, who described some of his opponents as 'girlie men' when they failed to confront a tough political issue to his satisfaction.

This aversion to emotions is not just implicit. Managers have easily spelt out *why* emotions are bad. They interfere with efficiency, reasoning and judgement; are time wasting; and hold people back from taking the necessary hard decisions. Rightly, in this sense, they say that emotions get in the way of organisational effectiveness. Women – and men – please note.

But the challenges, the stresses and strains, are great in this 21st century of ours. Wall Street and its equivalents around the world demand permanent growth of profits; and so corporate leaders keep upping the ante on their people. Revenues must increase even as costs continue to be squeezed.

Globalisation brings the need to operate around the clock, seven days a week. And efforts to remain competitive result in the now familiar phenomenon of downsizing, including through outsourcing and constant restructuring.

The pressures to comply with contemporary governance requirements and government regulations are also constantly increasing.

Why am I reminding you of all this? Because of its consequences on the human beings who inhabit these organisations. For our ever-tougher competitive environment, always in search of squeezing more productivity from its human resources (I far prefer the term 'people'), fills those very resources with impotence, fear, anger and frustration. We read about it every day, and about the resulting stress.

We also know that in turn this leads to employees having less trust in their senior management, and so become less committed, less loyal.

It will not have escaped you that all these words represent *emotions*. *Negative* ones. Yes, despite all our efforts to *remove* unhelpful emotions from the workplace, our ruthlessly rational approach to building successful businesses has stimulated a terrible *intensification* of emotions. Not by design. But by effect.

These emotions may be a different mix from earlier ones, but if anything they are even deadlier, even more debilitating, than their predecessors.

The problem is massive, as the tough guys from Mars keep squeezing and squeezing, harder and harder. So do we just keep going along with the Martians, accepting the consequential absenteeism, the high burnout rate and the heavy staff turnover?

Do we live with the fear and anger, the frustration and stress? Do we just make do without trust and commitment and loyalty?

Or do we re-evaluate what we are doing to our work environments? Do we bring on some 'feminine' qualities from Venus, accepting that we live in a high-tech world that requires nanosecond responses, but still reaching out to our people with a 'soft touch'?

And please note, I'm not 'getting emotional' here. And I'm not looking for a 'Country Club' style of management where we just try and maintain 'happy chappies'. I'm talking about bringing in Emotional Intelligence, the kind of intelligence that calmly uses emotions to inspire, illuminate and enliven.

It's interesting that the renowned London Business School has recently been coming to terms with the fact that the skills in woefully short supply are the soft ones, the ones that enable planning and financial whiz-kids, and marketing and production gurus to get their ideas across and make things happen with and through other people.

It shouldn't be that surprising though. After all, anyone who believes we buy into ideas purely based on facts and figures is just fooling themselves. We all know that most of the time hard data is actually brought in merely to rationalise and justify our feelings and our intuition.

We also know that when women start climbing the organisational ladder they often feel they must become more macho than even their male counterparts. I hope you won't mind me referring to them by their proper name: balls busters! Pragmatically, rationally, they have figured out that if they are to fulfill their ambitions they must behave like Romans when they live in Rome.

But there are some very brave souls – among them men too, by the way – who defy the expected cultural stereotypes.

Instead of relying on tough-guy behaviour to move things forward they bring in their emotions, their 'feminine' emotions, to motivate the people around them. If they exist in places where the top guys promote macho management, then sooner or later they'll leave or be moved out. At best they'll be shunted off to calmer backwaters – like HR, or 'Personnel', often used to be.

If you're lucky enough to be in a situation where the top leadership is sensitive to the benefits of Emotional Intelligence, then allowing your own EQ to come to the fore will not be such a risky thing to do. But there aren't many places like that, are there?

Let me get a little more specific about these soft skills, these so-called 'feminine' ways, that speak of high EQ. It's all about a style of management that is suited to working with today's highly educated knowledge workforce, people who know their worth and where you have to keep earning the right to their loyalty.

Emotionally Intelligent leaders are not autocrats or stern parents, but coaches and mentors. They do not perch on top of steep pyramids but build interdependent networks of teams around them. They do not curtail and confine, but support and facilitate, as 'servant leaders' who remove obstacles and open up opportunities. They do not erode and crush self-esteem and self-confidence, but build them. By doing these things they build a culture within which their people will be more prepared to take risks, to go for big challenges, to own the corporate vision, and to commit to success.

Underpinning such cultures are essential values. The finest organisations are ones where these values are *lived, really* lived. It's not a question of lip service, as in 'people are our most valuable resource'. It's walking the talk, it's leading by example. And what strength it takes to trust; to support and to care for; to be open and honest; to be humble and of low ego; and to listen, to understand before we seek to be understood.

Right at the beginning I stated that high EQ people go for those ambitious win-win scenarios. I'd like to look a little deeper into what it takes to do so. And for this I turn to the wonderful Transaction Analysis framework expounded in the classic 1967 book by Thomas Harris called *I'm OK – You're OK*. I have found his thinking so very helpful over the years.

Dr. Harris urges us to try and go through life with the 'I'm OK, You're OK' attitude that gives his book its title. And in order to achieve this he challenges us to behave as 'adults'.

For him the state of adulthood means one which is contrasted to that of a child and that of a parent. An 'adult' for him is a mature, solution oriented person who likes to deal with other 'adults'. They thrive on 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' relationships, where transactions take place between strong, positive peers.

I think you can follow the link with Emotional Intelligence. Let me spell it out in this next chart, which draws the contrast between high and low EQ positions.

In each category there are four possible states, only one of which is a healthy one that leads to win-win. Without going into too much detail just take a look, and see how the left hand side compares to the right hand one.

There's much we can learn from this picture. Just to take one example, the macho 'I'm OK, You're not OK' character assumes he (or she!) will be winning at the expense of others – over people weaker than him, or her. We're not impressed, are we? Even if the he is a she!

The soft skills are vital if we are to release the full human potential. And it takes courage to work at levels beyond the basic, to see the greater release of available energy; of the creative juices; of drive and passion. And it's quite something to get people to buy in to your vision and values with such enabling power.

Perhaps surprisingly, emotions can even fuel the intellect. Well why not? If we put someone at their ease, will they not perform better than when they are inhibited by fear of failure or punishment?

Here's what Harvard psychologist Robert Rosenthal found: when people administering IQ tests treated their subjects warmly the test scores were highest.

I couldn't resist adding this quote from another psychologist, which in a light way makes the point that we have been paying too much attention to IQ, and, one might add, not enough to EQ.

Four years ago I became the President of the Rotary Club of Nairobi, the biggest and oldest club in sub-Saharan Africa. Let me tell you, there are few leadership challenges as severe as those involved in managing a Rotary Club for that one year of office.

The fact that you are leading volunteer peer professionals, all leaders in their own right, is in itself quite daunting. Then you can't hire or fire any of them; you have negligible powers of promotion and demotion; and there's no possibility of increasing or reducing salaries. So what's left to work with? Just inspiration and motivation. And as I've said at the bottom there, without extremely high EQ you're absolutely sunk.

Now I come to a very important question: is it OK to use charm to get your way? And in particular, is it OK for women? Is charm just a legitimate component of EQ? Or is it cheating to use such a weapon? You can see my view at the bottom there... and for men as well as for women, with their own gender as with the opposite sex. Provided...

Yes, provided you don't go overboard. There's a whole spectrum, isn't there, from the unacceptably negative to the ridiculously positive. Provided we women understand how to hold on to our femininity in a dignified way there is nothing wrong with putting on the charm. Using a light touch. In order to make others feel good. But I don't approve of taking it to being flirtatious. And to make the point more forcefully, neither am I a fan of seduction as a high Emotional Intelligence!

It is by seeing the whole spectrum that you know where the healthy position is: not grim and not overly playful. And while we're at it, not timid and not aggressive. You see where I've placed the stereotype feminist up on top: she is renowned for her aggression, her absence of a light touch... and her low EQ!

As I thought about myself in all of this business of EQ, here are some phrases that occurred to me. I have been operating in the business world for quite some time, in Kenya as well as far beyond. And I must say the whole feminist movement has rather passed me by. I've not related to it that closely. The reason for this is that I've never felt other than empowered.

As I have thought about why this might be so, I have concluded it's because I don't launch into my dealings with bank managers or major suppliers or clients, with very senior people or very junior ones, as a woman. Rather, I'm a person who just happens to be a woman. There's a subtle but very significant difference.

The person that is me is calm, polite, cheerful and respectful – yes, feminine too, and charming. But I absolutely expect to be treated with respect. I am assertive but not aggressive, standing firmly for what I believe in.

If that means that I score above average in my EQ, so be it. If that is why I often end up being asked to take on leadership roles in organisations where I am active, maybe these phrases provide the explanation.

Let me turn from my own situation to some interesting figures from the UK. In 2004 the Equal Opportunities Commission wanted to find out more about women in the workplace. Their study of 100 firms found that we tend to be more positive about ourselves, our colleagues and our line managers; we communicate with and support them better; we are happier in teams than our individualistic male counterparts; and overall we are happier and healthier employees, who display lower levels of stress and enjoy a better work-life balance.

Whatever the reasons, and I suggested some of the historic underlying ones at the beginning of this presentation, it seems we are emotionally more mature, more intelligent than the men who work alongside us.

Then in terms of sheer numbers the progress that women in the workplace have made is nothing short of stunning. So many more British women than men now go to universities... and they get more of the 1st Class degrees.

When it comes to professions like law, accountancy, medicine and teaching, over 60% of new entrants are women. The same is true for functional areas like marketing and human resources. And as we all know the same trends are apparent all over the world.

It makes you wonder what effect this will have as this high number of women makes its way through the organisational hierarchies over the coming years.

Will they continue fitting in with the prevailing macho cultures? Or will their increased critical mass give them greater courage to inject more feminine values and ways of behaving? I really hope they will make their presence felt heavily. For we just cannot continue operating through our Big Men and our Lone Rangers, who see themselves as the great personal heroes of the drama of organisational life.

It's actually up to us women. And up to you men.

For all of us the good news is that unlike with IQ, EQ can be developed. Who knows, wouldn't it be nice to think that just by having listened to me for the last few minutes I have raised the average EQ level in this room? Well, they do say that by recognising a problem you're half way to solving it. But don't get complacent!

Many women have decided that while indeed we want to engage in the corporate world, we are prepared to indulge in some balancing acts and some trade-offs. Our EQ has shown us for instance that functional areas such as marketing and human resource management play more to our 'feminine' strengths. These fields need even more of the soft skills of communicating, caring and so forth, and that is why you find so many more of us there than elsewhere... including in CEO slots.

Studies show that we are also increasingly prepared to sacrifice status and wealth if that is the price to pay for finding what have been called 'female friendly' environments. These are places where we can work the more flexible hours that allow us to look after family obligations and generally enjoy a healthier work-life balance.

Some people worry greatly about this very trend. One of them is a woman herself, Carol Black, the current President of the Royal College of Physicians in the UK. She feels that having too many women doctors will be detrimental to the medical profession. If women keep taking time off to have and to look after babies, they won't go for – or get – the most demanding jobs. So they have to make a choice. Professor Black has. She is unmarried and has no children!

In addition women have to be ‘trained in the ways of men’, she suggests, ‘to give them the capacity to be as influential’. I wonder what that means? Does the professor want us to be even more macho than we have already become? I think she needs some training herself: in Emotional Intelligence!

Moving from the physical to the spiritual, I reflected as I was preparing this session that the world’s religious hierarchies don’t help our cause. The Church of England has been justifiably accused of maintaining a ‘stained glass ceiling’ that prevents women from becoming Bishops. And I won’t even comment on how Catholics, Muslims, Orthodox Jews and others prescribe that leadership is only for men. Even in societies where women are at their most liberated such absolute constraints are less than helpful.

Surely, given our soft skills, among the places where we could make our biggest contribution are those where we could offer spiritual inspiration and comfort. But that’s just a personal view.

Let me quickly add that there is increasing evidence to show how the glass ceiling that has held us women back from penetrating the highest levels of leadership is not always kept in place by those awful men. It is we who are sometimes our own worst enemies.

Some of us buy in to cultures and traditions that have us play subordinate roles. We are so used to deferring to and obeying men from a young age that it becomes hard to break of the habit.

It is these same influences that can make us risk averse, not only fearing failure but also being scared of success. This stems from a lack of self-esteem, that erodes our self-confidence and leads us to undervalue our abilities.

Other women put the blame for not progressing on men when their own dysfunctional behaviour is the cause. So many of us are just too timid. And a sadly increasing number are far too aggressive. The EQ of such women is appalling, and frankly I’m ashamed of them.

And let’s face it, we do bear children. We do need time to look after them. People have come up with many emotionally-intelligent women-friendly ideas, including maternity (and paternity) leave, flexi-time, crèches in offices, telecommuting and so on. But in some environments, whether specialist such as emergency branches of surgery, or generalist as in senior management, we cannot have the cake and eat it. To accept that requires high EQ too.

I have had the privilege of mixing with a large number of business and professional women through my Presidency of the All Africa Businesswomen's Association. I have always been a passionate promoter of the economic empowerment of women, as much in the formal sector as in the informal one. And through ABBA we work to help already somewhat established women, present and emerging leaders, to fulfill their higher potential and to make the greatest possible difference in their environments.

We do this in the ways shown here – by offering workshops for professional development, by providing opportunities for networking and mentoring, and through assembling a database of our members so they can be visible to those searching for top-level talent. I'd like to think that we are an emotionally intelligent lot, just like the South African Business and Professional Women's organisation I had the pleasure of addressing some years ago here in Johannesburg.

Let me conclude with this trio of statements.

First statement: today's world is not one of large numbers of compliant manual labourers. We are mingling with skilled and demanding human beings, both women and men. Unless we as leaders can operate with high EQ they'll be off working for someone else, somewhere else.

Second statement: through historical accident women have had to develop their EQ more than men, so (as a generalisation) we are one step ahead in terms of needed contemporary behavioural tools.

Third statement: successful organisations are promoting more and more women into their boardrooms and into their senior management teams. Not only that, but organisations like IBM and others who have deliberately set out to enrich their gender balance have found that the bottom line has benefited handsomely.

So, the well-known saying that behind every successful man there's a woman is undergoing some fundamental re-engineering. We are the ones increasingly in front. But happily our men *are* supporting us, just as we've always supported them. I'm OK, You're OK; win-win. High EQ.

Thank you.

