



Amygdala hijack

Why being clever isn't everything

The case of the frozen police officer. A true story

Two young police officers are called to a domestic incident by a neighbor who is worried about the screams coming from next door.

This is the sort of situation the police hate. What will they find when they get there? A violent crime? Or will they simply be abused by everyone in the house?

As the two police officers arrive, a frightened six year old boy runs out into the garden. Rushing into the living room, they find a sobbing woman being threatened by a man with a kitchen knife. The younger of the two police officers is really scared, he's never faced an armed man before. He turns to his colleague to see what they should do. But his colleague has frozen.

He's the victim of an Amygdala Hijack. The frozen police officer is in the grip of a sudden surge of adrenalin that has stopped him dead in his tracks. But this is no help to his young colleague and, after the adrenaline stops flowing, he will regret not having done something.

It's a neurological thing

A quick biology lesson

The amygdala is an almond shaped cluster of interconnected structures perched above the brain stem near the bottom of the limbic ring.

End of lesson

All you really need to know is that the amygdala is the brain's specialist for emotional matters. Think of it as an emotional stormtrooper, able to hijack the brain, causing it to flood the body with stress hormones geared to 'fight' or 'flight'.

So what happened next?

Fortunately, there's a lot more to a brain than the amygdala, otherwise we'd all be quivering wrecks of emotion. In this case, the colleague of the frozen police officer realized that what he was seeing in the knifeman was fear.

The police officer reports saying quietly, without thinking about it: 'Are you OK, sir?' It's almost funny, really – a silly question. But suddenly the anger drained out of the knifeman and he started crying.

No weapons. No shouts of:

Just the question:

“put the
knife down now” “are you
OK, sir?”

It's good policing and an example of how the brain's prefrontal lobes act as a manager for the emotions and help us decide how to use the range of emotional tricks up our sleeves. When to praise, when to persuade, when to laugh uproariously at your client's unfunny joke or, for this police officer, when to show sympathy.

These emotional skills and our ability to use them are what we call Emotional Intelligence (EI).

What is Emotional Intelligence?

In the words of EI guru Dr Daniel Goleman (more about him later), Emotional Intelligence is: 'the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.'

In this case, the police officer acknowledged his own feelings and inexperience, but wasn't overwhelmed by them. Indeed, he took the lead when he realized that his colleague had 'frozen'. He was demonstrating some of the elements that are so important in Emotional Intelligence: emotional self-awareness, empathy, and influence.

Self-Awareness

Knowing your emotions and their effects.

Self-Management

Knowing how to manage your emotions, how to keep disruptive impulses in check. Being flexible and comfortable with new ideas.

Social Awareness

An ability to listen, to be persuasive, to collaborate, to nurture relationships.

Relationship Management

An ability to influence others, handle conflict, develop, lead and work with others.

EQ versus IQ

These days we can take a good level of technical knowledge and intellectual ability in a given job for granted. These are qualities related to our IQ. Our Emotional Quotient (EQ) measures personal qualities such as empathy, adaptability and persuasiveness.

These qualities are becoming more and more important in a world fragmented by technology and changing work structures.

How important? We reckon that EQ is twice as important as IQ in determining future career success (not to mention what is does for your social life). And it can count for even more.

Would you rather be clever or successful?

Did that annoying classroom genius go on to even greater success in later life? Probably not. A study of Harvard graduates showed that their entrance results (in other words their IQ) had a negative or zero correlation with their future career success. Okay, so they were all bright to start with but what set them apart was their Emotional Intelligence.

It's a growing phenomenon. The emotional abilities of today's children are dropping even as their IQ is rising. So Emotional Intelligence is becoming more and more important as a way of recognizing tomorrow's leaders. A low level of Emotional Intelligence can actually hold you back; think of the boss who loses their temper. Out of control emotions can render the smartest people stupid. The smart thing to do is work on your EQ.

The latest in a long line of great thinking

It's not a fad, it's not a trend. EI is the result of a long history of analyzing social intelligence (otherwise known as 'what makes people tick').

Since the beginning of the last century, great minds have been looking at how we interact and how we can measure skills that we now define as Emotional Intelligence.

From E. L. Thorndike who identified the concept of social intelligence in 1920 to the pioneering work of Daniel Goleman of Harvard University in the 1990s, EI research has come a long way. We now have the ability not just to evaluate, but also to develop behaviors associated with Emotional & Social Intelligence; the behaviors that have a direct impact on our effectiveness in the workplace and as leaders.

Another Emotional Intelligence guru, and contributor to our program, is Dr Richard Boyatzis. His research showed that in a survey of 2000 supervisors and managers of 16 abilities that distinguished stars, all but two were emotional.

In fact, the more people advanced in their career the more important their emotional and social skills became in distinguishing superior performance.

Hay Group has also worked closely with Richard to develop a theory of learning and change performance that is designed to predict effectiveness. This theory has been widely tested around the world, both academically and in the workplace.

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What do Winston Churchill, Richard Branson and John Harvey Jones have in common?

They didn't exactly shine at school, not that it held them back. There's a lot more to business effectiveness and leadership than brains alone. That's why recognizing the value of Emotional Intelligence is helping businesses the world over become more productive and happier places to work.

We've all come across someone who's 'lost it' in a meeting, or gone blank at a presentation, or who creates a bad atmosphere in a team. Out of control emotions can have a massive impact on how others perceive you, but the question is how much does this behavior cost the business and how much might raising EI levels do for your business? Learning to understand yourself and how others see you by developing your EI is the key to improving your chances of success.

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There are numerous studies and statistics to show we're not making this up, but here are a few highlights. Studies have shown:

Software developers with high levels of EI can develop effective software three times faster than others.

Sales consultants with high levels of EI generate twice the revenue of their colleagues.

A national furniture retailer found that sales people hired based on EI had half the drop out rate during their first year.

Experienced partners in a multinational consulting firm who were assessed on their levels of Emotional Intelligence delivered \$1.2 million more profit from their accounts than did other partners – a 139% difference.

Managers of an oil refinery who participated in our EI development program over two years showed a 20% increase in performance compared to similar employees who did not participate.

Still not convinced?

There's a clear link between depression and illness, or optimism and recovery. Healthy relationships between medical staff and their patients lead to healthy people.

For example, at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York elderly orthopedic patients, who were given therapy for depression in addition to normal care, left the hospital an average of two days earlier, saving \$1,000 per patient.

Other studies into the doctor/patient relationship have shown that empathy in the doctor reduces the chances of a hospital being sued for negligence. Hay Group's own study of nurses and nurse managers found that there were significantly better outcomes – staff turnover; professional practice behaviors; staff, patient and doctor satisfaction; as well as clinical indicators – where the nurse managers created a good group work climate using emotional competencies.

... and in healthy results

Another demonstration of the value of Emotional Intelligence comes from the financial sector. Hay Group provided emotional competency development support for 45 sales people in the insurance industry. Our client gave high quality product and sales training to a matched sample of 45 other sales people. Their intention was to run a comparison of the two groups for a full year. They called a halt to the action research after seven months because the difference in sales results was so large that they could not afford to wait another five months before training the control group.

Can EI be taught?

Only if you want to learn. The fact is there's a lot you can do to improve or understand your Emotional Intelligence. It's not easy and it takes time and commitment to break old habits and establish new ones. But it can be done.

We've found that the people who really improve their EI have some surprising things in common

- They don't bite off more than they can chew
- They are really clear about what the payoff for them will be if they change
- They focus their energy on making the most of their strengths before looking at their weaknesses
- They are feedback junkies – they are tenacious about asking those around them for feedback to see if they're doing well

We've learnt from the masters – now it's your turn

With the help of Emotional Intelligence gurus like Dr Goleman and Dr Boyatzis, we've been able to develop a 360 degree feedback survey and development tools that can really help people understand and improve their Emotional and Social Intelligence.

As well as a wealth of experience to draw on, our consultants are constantly trying innovative ways of passing on what they know about Emotional Intelligence. We don't believe in a 'one size fits all' solution to your development, so we'll help you create something that's right for your organization.

For more details on our diagnostic feedback tools or Emotional Intelligence programs, please contact us or take a look at the Emotional Intelligence pages of the Hay Group website.

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Hay Group is a global consulting firm that works with leaders to transform strategy into reality. We develop talent, organize people to be more effective and motivate them to perform at their best. Our focus is on making change happen and helping people and organizations realize their potential.

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