

Team EQ: It's More Than Just Getting Along

By Tanya Goodwin-Maslach

“When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality” – Joe Paterno

Imagine you are one of six team members. You're 700 miles away from the nearest civilization, the island you're on provides you with a mere 1000 square yards or so of 'space', and nobody has access to a telephone. Your primary mode of communication is through radio, but there are only specific times when that's an option. Half of your group is representing one company and the other half is representing another company. You share minimal resources to accomplish your goals, sleep in an old coast guard barracks and alternate responsibility for making dinner for the group every evening. How does a team like this operate effectively in conditions like these? And how can they be an example for others who operate in less remote, but just as challenging business environs?

To start, teams like these have redefined the phrase 'getting along'. Whether on a coral atoll 700 miles away from the nearest civilization or in an office building down the street from a food court, emotionally intelligent teams share some common practices that move them beyond just 'getting along'. For a look at how they do it, let's look at a working committee's effort to become a more emotionally intelligent, higher performing team.

All members were experienced in the topic at hand and expressed enthusiasm for the future. But over the course of several months, motivation and performance seemed to lag. The team leader noticed members not following-

through on commitments despite their agreements to complete tasks by certain dates. People smiled and constructively disagreed with each other during meetings, but the team leader was worried as accountability continued to falter. Instead of wondering when the team would start turning around, the team leader engaged them in a discussion about how they *felt* about the team's working habits – seeking to get a barometer of the current emotional state of her team. Doing so gave her a better understanding of the long-standing norms already part of the group and an explanation of how she'd be most successful as a leader to move the team forward.

This process taught the team leader that her fast-paced, high energy style was in conflict with current team norms, one of which was a more relaxed approach to completing projects. Since the projects the team worked on didn't require a quick turn-around, it wasn't necessary to alter the group's working climate. It was just this leader's style to set a quicker pace to realize results. The team leader knew that pushing the team to operate so differently from its current norms would eventually cause problems for group productivity and cohesiveness, possibly causing a dismantling of the group entirely. By demonstrating her awareness of the group's increasingly dissonant emotional state she showed her willingness to listen and be adaptable

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in order to ensure group productivity and cohesiveness. This awareness and emotion management is critical for high emotional intelligence teams since it provides them the foundation for building stronger relationships within their team and those outside the organization, as well.

But in emotionally intelligent teams, this behavior is not only exhibited by the team leader. All team members practice these skills. Higher performing team members practice demonstrating emotional awareness and empathy when obvious, or not so obvious; moods or emotions are present in their groups. They realize that negative emotions are highly infectious and can wreak havoc on the productivity, cohesiveness and performance of their group. Errant behavior, like not completing an agreed upon task or acting in an unprofessional or disrespectful manner, is not acceptable, and emotionally intelligent team members feel comfortable addressing those head on, sometimes even using humor as a strategy.

Back in our committee, the team leader has taken the first step in developing a more emotionally intelligent team. Bringing the team's operating norms to their collective awareness also increased the group's understanding of how some of those norms have impeded them from making a greater impact on their organization's performance. From this, they embarked on a discussion for developing their abilities to understand and manage their emotions. (This kind of discussion can be difficult for some groups without guidance from an objective third party, a skilled facilitator or a tool offering suggestions for skill development.) The team leader's coaching style and skill in facilitating such a discussion in a safe and

optimistic environment enabled the group to engage in such a discussion. In the end, this team had begun practicing the behavioral changes that were required to realize new group norms for more effectively working with each other and others inside and outside their organization. If your interest is improving your team's productivity and cohesiveness or reenergizing your group's focus and passion, the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™-Team Edition will help you take the first hard steps. Team building processes should always start with identifying a team's current reality, and with the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™-Team Edition, team members can anonymously rate and report on the behaviors of the group that are causing tension. The overall Team EQ customized report, with an engaging e-learning program, practical strategies for skill development and a Goal-Tracking System™, provide members with the resources they need to start talking about how to become a more emotionally intelligent team.

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Tanya Goodwin-Maslach specializes in leadership development and organizational culture change. She has developed and facilitated leader retreats and workshops, coordinated and led professional development programs, and written on leadership development strategies for domestic and global organizations.

She has served the San Diego Board of the American Society for Training and Development as the Board and Business Development Director and initiated and Chaired a Governance Committee to develop tools for strengthening the leadership capabilities of her local chapter. Tanya holds a B.S. in Marine Zoology from Oregon State University and is completing her M.A. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology at California School of Professional Psychology.