Can You Develop Emotional Intelligence Online?

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Let's face it; emotional intelligence (EQ) is difficult to pin down. EQ is a fluid, social ability that explains how an individual recognizes, understands and manages emotions personally and with others. Decades of research show that EQ predicts success on the job over any other skill, including IQ and technical expertise. For leadership positions, EQ accounts for nearly 80% of job performance.

Now for the hard part: Is it an option to develop soft skills such as EQ using high tech methods? Improvements in survey and training technology during the last decade beg the question, "Can my employees boost their EQ online?"

The short answer is an emphatic, "Yes!" However, the answer to this question comes with the caveat that it may be a bit 'out of the box' from your typical training solution. Not surprisingly, simulations and virtual activities are not the answer.

So how *do* you improve a flexible, social skill like emotional intelligence virtually?

E-learning programs and internet-based surveys are the future of employee development that is here today. Using these methods, it is easy to deliver the same content to all employees quickly, at the same time and in the same way. Using adult learning principles to change behavior in a virtual environment is not easy. It's also tough to climb Mount Everest, but your Sherpa knows this and understands how to help you along the way. E-learning providers have been slow to address the inherent difficulty in building emotional intelligence skills in a virtual environment, but this is about to change.

Measure It First
Learning becomes 'real' for people when it begins where they are now; their current EQ skill level. An e-learning program must incorporate a reliable measure of employee emotional intelligence through a valid survey.

Teaching content around a new skill is important, but only the beginning of the development process. Content must reference the employee's on the job behavior and a good survey will do this. The results of this assessment (current EQ skill level) enable the

online training vehicle to take the next critical step in the learning process, making it relevant and personal to the learner.

Make It Personal
Believe it or not, an online environment is the perfect place to make it personal. As long as the participant has a real measure of their behavior on the job, they can take what they learn and apply it to their situation.

The key to changing any behavior is to "own it" and take full responsibility for what you say and do. Sitting privately in front of a computer is a great place for employees to think through how they use emotions at work. Here the learner has the space to absorb the information, reflect on its worth and discover that emotional intelligence skills are measurable and visible.
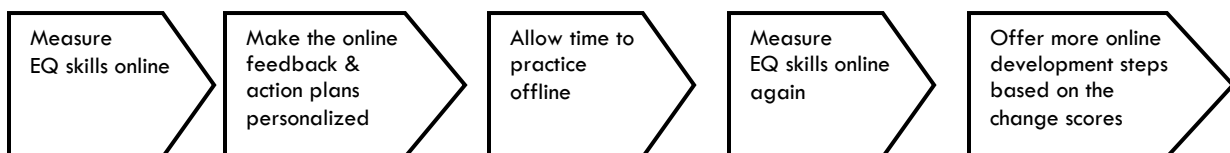
Training sessions and closed-door feedback meetings with coaches take longer to achieve the same objective. In these learning environments, the trainer or coach must take time to create safety for the learner. This stranger, even if skilled and professional, must overcome the learner's concern about being judged by someone they just met. Online, the results are solely about the learner and for the learner.

The second part of making it personal is telling the learner what to do now. Specific action steps must be readily accessible based on the results. Employees don't have the time to figure out what to do next and shouldn't have to go searching. Virtual development modules can now offer branching methods to provide the learner with the best action steps for them. Adult learners no longer have to be forced through pages of content that don't apply. Instead, they only use the information most relevant to them. This cannot be said for group training sessions.

Follow Up!
E-learning platforms offer one more critical step in the online learning process. After a period of practice and development time, learners can return to their virtual development program and measure their EQ skills again. Their results can be compared with their first EQ skill scores to produce an EQ change score. Here is where online EQ development programs offer personalized follow-through. Change scores measure progress and offer new suggestions for practicing EQ skills in the future.

The process for developing emotional intelligence online:

Measure EQ skills online	Make the online feedback & action plans personalized	Allow time to practice offline	Measure EQ skills online again	Offer more online development steps based on the change scores

About the authors:
Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves are co-authors of the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™, an EQ survey suite for individuals and teams. In their online editions, these surveys combine a valid measure of your EQ with e-Learning targeted to your unique score profile and Goal Tracking to influence and track change. The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™ is available at www.TalentSmart.com