

Team EQ: It's a Matter of Survival

By Tanya Goodwin-Maslach

Imagine you are one of six team members working 700 miles from civilization on an island that provides a mere 1000 square yards of “space.” Your only form of communication with the outside world comes from an antiquated two-way radio. Half of your group represents one organization and the other half represents another. You have minimal resources available to accomplish your goals, sleep in an old coast guard barracks and eat dinner together each evening at sundown.

How can a team operate effectively in these conditions? A perplexing question, especially when you consider that most teams have difficulty working together in far more favorable circumstances. The answer? Teams of scientists working 700 miles from civilization are required to be emotionally intelligent. They realize it's necessary for their survival, as well as the accomplishment of project objectives.

Whether a team is on an island, in the conference room or chatting in the food court, there are common team emotional intelligence practices they can use to work together cohesively. First, though, what is team emotional intelligence (EQ)? Team EQ is a set of skills that describe how team members collectively perceive emotions and what they do to manage these emotions effectively.

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

Emotional intelligence differs from intelligence because it is an ability that can be learned and improved. You usually see EQ in how a person manages his/her behavior and interacts with others.

An intact team actually has its own EQ, which is based on the standards for behavior that the group accepts as normal. The team of scientists from each organization knew that each group shared similar resources for accomplishing very different goals. During certain work cycles, the group's tendency was to think competitively instead of collaboratively, which would derail team productivity and morale. In other circumstances, members would withdraw or disengage from situations. The group's awareness of their competitive tendencies and their reactions to the nature of their work prompted them to develop strategies, like humor, for managing their emotions. Over time, this helped keep the team's morale high and working relationships productive. No one on the team had to be emotionally intelligent all the time, but everyone on the team had to have the ability to contribute in an emotionally intelligent way some of the time. Together the team had to choose what action it was going to take **as a group**. Focusing on the team's current reality is a critical first step in developing team emotional intelligence.

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Team Emotional Intelligence



- 1) **Emotional awareness:** Can people on the team accurately identify the emotions in the group and understand each member's general tendencies for responding to situations?
- 2) **Emotion management:** Can team members respond to the emotions in the room and the group's overall mood to manage emotions constructively and achieve team objectives?
- 3) **Internal Relationship Management:** Can team members interact with each other effectively to better respond to difficult or challenging situations within the group?
- 4) **External Relationship Management:** Can the team interact effectively across the organization and with outside parties?

So how do teams that aren't trapped together on an island develop their emotional intelligence? Teams are influenced by the predominant emotions of group members. A crucial first step for teams is to understand the *tendencies* of the group as a *whole* and learn to manage them effectively. For our scientists on the island, scarce resources weren't as difficult to manage as the loss of an important piece of equipment, surviving an impending tidal wave, or ensuring the survival of a seal pup that had just lost a flipper to a

hungry shark. Even though the conditions are different, all teams face emotionally challenging situations. Teams who harness emotional intelligence are able to look at their tendencies (emotional-awareness) and discover how it impacts morale, cohesiveness and productivity.

Teams that acknowledge the needs or moods of the group and respond in a constructive and positive way have developed the foundation for building stronger relationships within their team

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and those outside the organization. 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. Teams can also participate in a measurement of Team EQ to discover their strengths and opportunities for improvement. *The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal™ - Team EQ Edition* helps teams improve their EQ by identifying their current reality objectively. In taking the assessment, each team member anonymously rates the group as a whole, and the ratings are combined to deliver their Team EQ score. The test includes open-ended questions for commentary, and the team's scores are compared to a large normative database to see how they fare relative to others from a cross section of industries.

The assessment is administered online and takes each person just 10 minutes to complete. Results are provided at the click of a button and are delivered in an engaging e-learning program the entire group shares. This program includes clips from Hollywood movies and historical events to bring Team EQ to life and a complete Goal-Tracking System™. The report is easy to download and print from the web to bring in hard copy to team meetings. Most teams find their results are a great way to begin discussions that produce real results.

CLICK HERE to learn more about The Emotional Appraisal- Team Edition

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tanya Goodwin-Maslach

Tanya Goodwin-Maslach is a consultant with TalentSmart® who specializes in leadership development and organizational culture change. Her experience includes developing and facilitating strategic planning sessions, leadership development conferences, and team development retreats. She has published several articles and book chapters including contributions to *Best Practices for Leading the Global Workforce*, *Leading and Managing Change*, and *Tips For Practicing the Art of Exemplary Leadership*.

She has served on 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 the chapter. Tanya holds a B.S. in Marine Zoology from Oregon State University and is a candidate for a Master of Arts in Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the California School of Professional Psychology.

Prior to joining TalentSmart®, she worked with ACP, Inc. as a Leadership Development Consultant and in her previous career was a marine biologist.