

Principals' Emotional Intelligence Outweighs IQ

New principals may experience frustration despite having succeeded in educational leadership higher education training and possessing a high IQ. That is because a principal's ability to succeed in the workplace is more dependent on one's emotional intelligence. It is a better predictor of life success than the knowledge you possess or the technical skills you need to demonstrate to fulfill daily responsibilities.

According to experts and a dissertation study we recently conducted ("New Principals' Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Their Own Social and Emotional Competence"), emotional competence includes awareness of emotions in self and others, tolerance, interpersonal relationship skills, flexibility, and self-management skills. A successful new principal must be emotionally competent.

Because of the diverse nature of school communities, a keen new principal will not only be tolerant of differences, but also appreciate those differences. It is through interpersonal relationships that people accomplish goals. Therefore, new principals must focus on developing and sustaining excellent interpersonal relationships through collaboration, flexibility, and time management.

Becoming Emotionally Intelligent

Based on this study, past research, and our many years of administrative experience in K-12 education, we suggest the following for both new and experienced principals.

Assess your own emotional intelligence. There are instruments available to assess your emotional competence, such as the Widener Emotional Learning Survey (WELS). Our study found that new principals ranked "awareness of emotions in self and others" and

"interpersonal relationships" as their areas of strength. Top-ranked areas of weakness included tolerance and self-management. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Practice reflection as you experience your day. It's harder than it sounds. Techniques include taking note (literally or figuratively) of your emotions during crisis situations, when handling interpersonal conflict, dealing with diversity issues, or reflecting on how you managed your time on any given day. Mindful reflection can only improve your emotional competence over time.

Once you have formally assessed or reflected on your own emotional competence, try to identify your strengths and areas of weakness. Some example questions to ask yourself based on areas of emotional intelligence may include:

- In a given situation, how am I feeling? What emotions are others in this situation experiencing?
- Am I being tolerant of differences of opinion expressed by others?
- How am I treating people in my building on a daily basis? How do people feel when they engage in conversations with me?
- Am I being rigid in my decisions, or do I value the input of others?
- Am I managing my time well? Am I taking care of my health physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, and spiritually?


Do something about it. Professional development must include deliberate practices to raise our level of emotional intelligence. Such efforts will afford you opportunities that are intentionally designed to develop a deeper awareness of your emotional competence and engage colleagues and mentors in meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Assessing your emotional competence gives you the opportunity to celebrate and continue the practices identified as strengths. Most importantly, though, reflection on your weaknesses can provide you with direction about how to develop your emotional intelligence.

Discuss the topic of emotional intelligence with some carefully selected colleagues and peers. Purposeful discussion about this oft-neglected topic provides an opportunity to learn from different perspectives.

Still Need Convincing?

Think about someone you have worked with who was an inspiration to you. It should be a person who motivated you and who made you feel good about the work you were doing. Now consider if you think the pull toward this person was the result of his or her IQ. Or was it more likely the result of how this person interacted with you, listened to you, and made you feel appreciated?

Those are descriptors of someone who might be considered emotionally intelligent and are likely the reasons you enjoy interacting with this person. Would you like to have that same type of impact on the people you work with and work for? If so, take action toward developing your awareness of your emotional intelligence. 

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