

Coaching for Emotional Intelligence

Laura Belsten, Ph.D.

Meet Jan, Steve and Richard.

Jan

Bright, talented 20-something employee at an international consulting firm. Exceptional analytical and writing skills. Less-than-exceptional people skills.

Reason for Seeking Coaching: After a disastrous performance at her first and only client meeting—according to her supervisor, she interrupted, invalidated, lectured and demonstrated a lack of respect—Jan's been benched. She knows her career options will be limited if she continues to be relegated to data analysis and report-writing, so she's sought coaching voluntarily.

Steve

VP of manufacturing for a global satellite television company, charged with overseeing plants around the world. Able to get work done on time and under budget while still ensuring high quality. Unable to communicate respectfully to his supervisees.

Reason for seeking coaching: Steve's supervisees have described him as hot-headed, hostile, demanding, dictatorial, abrasive, rough around the edges and even toxic. Several talented employees have left the company because of his management style, and disengagement is a problem among his remaining supervisees. His company has asked him to work with a Leadership Coach to become more respectful of others.

Richard

Business analyst and liaison to the IT department in an insurance company. Known as "the nicest guy at the office." Also known as "the guy who never says no."

Reason for seeking coaching: With so much on his plate, Richard ends up working nights and weekends to finish the tasks he's taken on, and assignments still go uncompleted. He feels like he can never get ahead, and sometimes feels like an imposter. Plagued by self-criticism and indecision, he's enlisted a coach as he decides whether to stay in his position or seek work elsewhere.

Q: What do Jan, Steve and Richard have in common?

A: They all lack social and emotional intelligence.

Defining S+EI

Social and emotional intelligence (S+EI) is the ability to be aware of our emotions and the emotions and concerns of others and to use that information to manage ourselves and our relationships, both in the moment and over the long term.

Early emotional intelligence (EI; sometimes written as EQ) researchers and theorists included Peter Salovey, John Mayer, David Caruso and Howard Gardner, aka the father of the concept of multiple intelligences. The concept of EI entered the public consciousness in 1995 when Daniel Goleman published his best-selling book, *Emotional Intelligence*. Goleman, then a science writer for the *New York Times*, took the concept of EI out of the realm of academia and made it accessible to a general audience. In addition to piquing the public's interest in EI, Goleman's book sparked substantial research; as a result, we now know that EI is a better indicator of personal and professional success than cognitive intelligence (IQ).

More recently, the conversation surrounding EI has broadened to include social intelligence; i.e., relationship management and the outward manifestation of EI's internal component. Perhaps the best way to think about the concept is through the Four-quadrant Model (shown below), based on Daniel Goleman's work.

S+EI and Coaching

Having strong S+EI supports masterful coaching. By being aware of the emotions coming up for us in the coaching interaction, as well as attuning ourselves to the client's emotional state, we can better manage the coaching relationship. We're able to pick up not only on what's being said, but also what isn't being said, and we're able to better understand and support the client's growth and development.

Incorporating S+EI work into coaching also provides a common language—an emotional vocabulary—that can make it easier for the coach and client to have difficult conversations. This is particularly important for clients who feel overwhelmed by their emotions, as well as for clients who have been taught to repress or discount their emotional responses. Finally, the work of cultivating S+EI adds skills to our coaching tool kits that make us far more effective. As coaches, our primary interest is in helping our clients achieve success. Given the demonstrated importance of S+EI in shaping future success, it follows that coaches skilled in S+EI coaching are better able to support their clients.

Intelligence in Practice

The ICF Core Competencies call on coaches to help our clients create awareness—of themselves, of others and of the situations they encounter. Awareness is also the foundation of S+EI, with self-awareness as the starting point. After all, we can't be aware of the emotions others might be experiencing if we don't have the ability to be aware of what we are experiencing; we also can't manage our emotional responses without this awareness and understanding.

In their daily lives, all three of the clients introduced at the beginning of this article displayed a lack of self-awareness; as such, this needed to be the first area of coaching intervention. One way to increase

clients' self-awareness is by showing them how they're seen by others. Soliciting direct feedback is one way to gather this information; this is how Jan learned about clients' negative perceptions. A 360-degree-feedback assessment can also be used to collect this information. This approach proved useful for Steve, yielding feedback that helped him see how his frequent blowups impacted his subordinates, peers and supervisors.

One activity recommended across the board for fostering emotional self-awareness is emotional tracking. The coach can provide clients with a comprehensive list of emotions and request that they track what they're feeling throughout each day for a week. This kind of steady, sustained self-reflection helps clients become more aware of what they're experiencing in the moment. It also expands their emotional vocabulary, giving them a better understanding of and language for the nuances of what they're feeling. For example, are they feeling anxious, or apprehensive? There's a difference. Are they feeling enthusiastic or exhilarated? Again, there's a difference.

Jan and Steve initially pushed back on the idea of tracking their emotions, saying they were too busy, but with encouragement each gave it a try. Not surprisingly, Richard said yes immediately when presented with the idea.

Jan came to her next coaching session, spreadsheet in hand, saying she was surprised by the exercise. "I didn't think I even had emotions!" she exclaimed. The exercise helped her identify moments when she'd become defensive (when a client questioned her data analysis, for example), and her interpersonal communication skills improved as she tuned in to this reaction. Over time, she developed the ability to read her clients, and discovered that what she heard as criticism was in fact clients' confusion about details of her reports. She became better able to respond in a helpful manner and a pleasant tone of voice to their lack of understanding when she realized it was about them, not her.

Although Steve wasn't as thorough as Jan, he completed the exercise with enough frequency to discover a pattern to his anxiety and frustration—those moments and situations when he was most likely to blow up at the people around him. Steve's coach asked him to think about these emotional triggers and consider his usual reaction, as well as the impact this reaction had on people around him. (The 360 assessment provided useful context here.) Steve observed that his frustration first showed up in his body, with a tensing of the shoulders followed by a clenching of fists, and he was able to come up with several new, more constructive ways of responding to his triggers.

Richard tracked his emotions on an hour-by-hour basis over the course of the week. Like Steve, he identified some patterns to his emotional responses, and came to the session feeling that his self-awareness was significantly heightened. He realized he felt resentful when people asked him to do things outside his job description, manipulated when asked to tackle low-priority tasks and paralyzed when asked to take on other people's responsibilities. Richard and his coach brainstormed together to explore new responses to these requests and design new actions, such as setting boundaries and priorities. He even began to experiment with saying "no."

S+EI is squarely in the public consciousness and offers a promising area of growth for coaches. With literally hundreds of tools for assessing and developing S+EI at our disposal, coaches can ensure that our

own S+EI competencies are well-developed, while also working toward a theoretically sound coaching practice that empowers our clients' own S+EI growth and development.

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Author Bio: International Coach Federation Master Certified Coach Laura Belsten, Ph.D., is a Leadership and Executive Coach; a Social + Emotional Intelligence Certified Coach; and a graduate of the Coaches Training Institute, Coach U and Corporate Coach U. She is the founder and executive director of the Institute for Social + Emotional Intelligence, and the author of the Social + Emotional Intelligence Profile (SEIP)[®] and the *Sage and Scholar's Guide to Coaching Social and Emotional Intelligence*. She also co-edited the *Proceedings of the First ICF Coaching Research Symposium*.

Laura's work in S+EI is based on the latest research, and all programs, tools and exercises available through the Institute are evidence-based, grounded in research, and scientifically validated and tested. In addition to her work with the Institute, Laura coaches executives and leaders to reach their highest levels of success through her private Executive Coaching practice of 15 years, CEO Partnership—Coaching Executives + Organizations.