

Do nice guys come first?

A brief introduction to Emotional Intelligence

Recruiters need to know about emotional intelligence (known as EI). Assessing EI will help you place senior managers, sales people and customer service staff. Using it in your job will help you get on.

So, what is EI?

A Case Study

Tony is a manager who prides himself on his ability to deal with people. He gets up one morning to find his hot water tank has burst. He calls in the plumber, goes to work and:

- chairs a crucial meeting with his usual even-handedness and tact;
- hears that one of his team is underperforming so invites him into his office, states exactly what the problem is, sets objectives and agrees a follow up;
- listens to his assistant Norman lay out the options for an urgent decision, prompts him for the background and makes the decision by the deadline;
- gives a completely different presentation to three different groups on company strategy. They all contain the same content but are written differently;
- tells anyone who asks about his hot water tank.

Tony is showing aspects of emotional intelligence: not getting over-emotional but remaining human; being consistent; taking decisions appropriately even if he hasn't got all the information; tackling problems quickly without humiliating people; communicating in a way which fits his audiences' knowledge and interests.

You could say Emotional Intelligence is "knowing how to get on with people", which implies you understand them. At work it also involves "treating people appropriately so that you achieve your goals."

Who discovered EI?

A 1996 book by Daniel Goleman resurrected a much earlier idea that we have not one but many intelligences. You meet people who can read and understand avant garde novels but can't change a light bulb; who can hold an audience spell bound in a presentation but can't add two numbers together. Goleman was tapping into that sort of thing. He suggested there were many sorts of intelligences; from traditional IQ to musical and kinaesthetic ("intelligence in the way you use your body" as displayed by great sportspeople.)

The one that's stuck is EI. It's seen as a crucial element in certain areas of work.

Is EI About Being Nice?

No...it's about being appropriate. Emotional Intelligence is about treating people in the right way to get what you want, not wasting energy on displays of emotion. For instance, every manager knows that their employees expect them to tackle someone's underperformance quickly. If the manager doesn't, he or she loses credibility. So, "grasping the nettle" in the right way, at the right time is emotionally intelligent whereas ignoring it because you "don't like being nasty" is emotionally dumb.

But any manager worth their salts does that!

Reports from companies offering 360 ° feedback on EI suggest that managers are often unaware of their skills or lack of them in this area. Most people reckon they're good with people ! As it turns out, we're not as good as we think.

So, it's a part of management

Yes. Managers' jobs are more about getting other people to do things than doing them themselves.

If you're a web designer, your raw material is computer code. If you're a manager, people are your raw material.

The more senior you get, the more important this is. A board member may spend 90% of his or her time talking to colleagues, subordinates, investors and shareholders. Researchers at Henley Management College reckoned 30-40% of management success was down to EI.

What about other jobs?

You could say anybody in a team needs EI. It's particularly important where you're selling complex services and you have to understand where the customer is coming from (which may be very different from what they're saying) and how you can move them to a buying decision. If you're answering complaints over the phone you need to be emotionally intelligent without the physical cues you get when you meet someone.

Is EI the same as personality?

To some extent. EI looks at very specific aspects of how you behave at work. You'd use a personality or behavioural test to get a wider view of a person, an EI test to look at specific people-related issues.