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Importance of EQ skills for On-line Professors

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Academic Leadership Journal

In academia professors are hired based on their teaching experience, proven track records, peer and student evaluations and the degrees held.

While another form of intelligence — emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) — is equally, if not more, important to creating a successful organization there has been little discussion of EQ as a success factor in distance teaching. EQ includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.” (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004)

Distance learning has become widely used around the world and is available in a number of forms that greatly reduce the restrictions imposed on by the traditional class room environment. Various platforms allow the professors to hold live lectures, utilize PowerPoint presentations, and provide a learning environment that is as close to the campus lecture experience. Distance learning has grown and is continuing to grow in popularity as more and more colleges and universities are offering distance and hybrid programs.

Despite all of the attention given to the topic of EQ in the success of business leaders and its impact on their followers, very few articles have been written regarding the importance of high EQ professors that teach in the distance environment.

EQ is especially relevant in top leadership positions that demand high degrees of social interaction. Does a higher level of EQ yield higher success for professors who teach a distance? Should this be a consideration in the selection process of these professors? If you have ever had the opportunity to teach in an on-line environment, you understand that it is a much different experience than teaching in the traditional campus environment with many more challenges.

While the level of EQ involves how you self manage it also addresses how you engage with the emotions of others. As a seasoned on-line professor, I have seen many students that present high emotion, misdirected anger and blaming, poor time management, and a wide range of excuses that seem to hinder on-line success. On-line professors cannot act before they think or react too quickly to emails from students and administrators. By reacting too quickly the professor may causes further problems, discourage or frustrate students, or possibly risk losing the student all together.

Many of the issues that present themselves in the online environment and may deteriorate the professor and student relationship are not a result of teaching, subject matter expertise, or grading but result from faulty communications; the inability to understand how others function, failure to see others perspectives and failure to grasp their impact on the students. Email, which is the main form of communication in the online environment, can further contribute to the possibility of miscommunication in the course room.

The student that would not normally speak out in the classroom often may become very vocal in the

online environment. Soft skills seem to be more important in the distance environment than in the traditional classroom. These soft skills are present in those with higher levels of EQ. EQ skills help professors handle distressing emotions more effectively, to listen and to empathize with their students. These professors will not let their emotions rule them and will choose their attitudes.

Part of your job as an on-line professor is to have your own emotions in check so you're prepared to handle whatever comes up. Challenges will come up every day. An emotional electronic outburst on your part or even the hint of one through an abrupt email or comments won't help the resolve student concerns and problems. Since most of the communication in the on-line environment is through email, the backlash from the student can cause many issues for the professor and student. Learning to put yourself in a student's shoes can help you discover how best to reach that student.

The combination of knowledge relating to the subject matter being taught in the online course combined with a high level of emotional intelligence can lead to improved personal performance, better student performance, and improved student confidence. The better skilled you are emotionally, the more likely you are to understand what your student's needs, form strong bonds with them and with colleagues, reduce stress, manage your time well, and reach your goals (Reissman, 1999).

While the IQ and the academic degrees that one possesses may get you an offer to teach on-line, the level of EQ will help you to succeed and retain that on-line position.

References

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