

Guidelines for Securing Organizational Support For Emotional Intelligence Efforts

(Note: These guidelines emerged from a study of the development of the Emotional Competence program at American Express Financial Advisors. The study was conducted by Cary Cherniss, Ph.D., of Rutgers University, on behalf of the *Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations*.)

1. Link emotional intelligence to a business need.

Support for training and development in emotional intelligence will increase if it is clearly linked to a business need. People in the organization need to see it not as just a “nice” thing to do that makes people “feel good,” though this may be important and desirable. In order to gain the level of support needed for successful implementation, emotional intelligence must be viewed as something that makes good business sense.

2. Find a powerful sponsor.

For better or worse, organizations tend to be political entities. The support of an influential executive thus is vital for a new, unconventional initiative such as emotional intelligence training. Finding a powerful sponsor who can provide political protection and financial backing can make the difference between success and failure.

3. Establish a mechanism such as a “skunkworks” team for developing the idea.

Emotional intelligence is an innovative and unconventional idea in the organizational world. Efforts to promote it in organizations thus can be easily smothered by the rigidity of a bureaucracy. Ideally, it should be developed and initially operated by a self-managed team that has an “open ticket” to innovate. The team should have less formality, more flexible roles, and more open flows of information. It also should be kept relatively free of “creativity killers” such as surveillance, evaluation, over-control, and arbitrary deadlines. A particularly good way of achieving this type of setting is to establish a “skunkworks team,” which was the name of the famed R&D team at Lockheed that sequestered itself and produced a number of innovations.

4. Use research to evaluate the program and demonstrate its value.

Emotional intelligence activities that are not based on solid research are highly vulnerable. Emotional intelligence training, even more than other types of activity, needs to be research-driven. The research should be extensive enough to give key decision-makers confidence that emotional intelligence training is based on sound, objective analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative research have value in securing support.

5. Make sure that the program's quality is so high that it is beyond reproach.

Because emotional intelligence training is not a traditional business concern, it is vulnerable to criticism. To counteract the detrimental effects of such criticism, it is important to insure that training efforts meet the highest standards. If an emotional intelligence program becomes associated with shoddy, superficial work, resistance to it will increase further. Opponents of such training need few excuses to kill it.

6. Infuse emotional intelligence into the organization in a variety of ways.

In order to bring emotional intelligence training and development into the mainstream, it is useful to find different ways of positioning and presenting it in the organization. For instance, different versions of a program can be developed for different groups. Multiple infusion helps to normalize and generalize the concept. It also creates a culture in which people are repeatedly reminded of what they have learned and thus are more likely to apply it on the job.

7. Find emotionally intelligent leaders to guide implementation.

Implementing emotional intelligence initiatives in organizational settings often is a challenging task. Even with the support of powerful sponsors and good timing, one is likely to encounter much resistance. Success depends on the emotional intelligence of those who orchestrate the implementation effort.

8. Move when the timing is right

At certain times in the life of any organization, the conditions will be more or less favorable for the implementation of emotional intelligence training and development activities. Those who wish to establish such activities in their organization need to ask themselves whether the timing is right. Sometimes, it may be necessary to wait until conditions are more favorable.