

Building Emotional Sustainability

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The crisis conditions we see in the planetary environment today are a direct reflection of the crisis conditions we find in the workplace. No oil is spilled, no dangerous levels of carbon dioxide are generated, no toxic chemicals are manufactured, no resources are extracted, no investment vehicles are designed except as the result of people working together to get as much value from their efforts as possible. Here's the problem: our determination of what is valuable has been distorted by our perception of lack and the fear that this occasions in us at the deepest unconscious levels. The answer is embedded in using all our forms of intelligence. One of the most powerful is emotional and social intelligence.

Throughout the history of human cooperation there have been a long series of innovative attempts to find new ways to help people work together in a consistently productive manner. Too often these efforts have been less than fully successful because they lacked one critical component – they were not emotionally sustainable. In other words they do not consistently meet and transform the emotional needs of the people whose effort and cooperation was critical to the success of the mission.

Meeting the emotional needs of a project team for instance, means that the members feel safe and supported, and, when tensions arise, there is a user-friendly and effective means of resolving them. Achieving this dynamic is no small accomplishment, and those organizations that do so reap a handsome reward for their efforts. But there's more. Transforming the emotional needs of a group of coworkers may be even more important, because this process incorporates developing and integrating the skills of emotional communication in such a way that the costs of conflict distrust and disengagement are continually reduced as team members grow more effective individually and the team grows more integrated as a unit.

The sources of the energy we need to work are primarily biological in nature – nutrition, sleep, and exercise, but the management system that we use to engage and direct the energy is emotional. Our emotional evaluation of the environment tells us what direction to move and how rapidly. People who feel deceived, manipulated, intimidated, taken for granted or worried about their future cannot sustain the attention, communication, and cognitive effort it takes to be fully engaged. More and more of their energy is reallocated to defensive strategic behavior as they seek to stay safe and protect themselves. When you're feeling threatened you cannot innovate and you don't want to!

Whether or not it is convenient to the 24/7/365 world of business, the fact is our human needs will always get met in Maslow's order. We cannot override the unconscious, hardwired, instinctual patterns that organize our behavior, but when we understand how these internal processes work and learn how to *cooperate* with them consciously they can become assets for balancing production and consumption in a sustainable cycle. Our instincts program us to achieve success at two levels, initially on behalf of our individual survival and then in support of the collective survival of the species. As each of us seeks to outgrow our initial conditions of dependency we learn the very best ways we can to satisfy our personal needs and desires,



however eventually, if we have the right models and experiences, we realize that just getting our own needs met is insufficient.

We cannot begin to provide ourselves with everything we need to function in the world today, so over time both cognitive *and* emotional intelligence has taught us that the quality of our life depends on the quality of the lives of those around us. If others are safe and satisfied and creatively challenged, they are better able to cooperate with us in the interdependent processes of family, community, and commerce that make up human civilization. To our detriment our technological success has created a false vision of independence that makes it seem as if each of us can make it more or less "on our own" because our life support system seems to be accessed through a mechanical interface with "society" or "the economy" rather than cultivated as an intimate relationship with our community. Consequently we are not forced to do the reality testing necessary to determine what level of true empathy and care we need to contribute to the real social network that supports us. Our recent technical "success" has allowed us to withdraw, isolate, and exclude others in ways that are eroding the very foundations of our economic security.

The values that underlie the long-term thinking, visioning, planning, and execution that have built civilization thus far have given way to shorter and shorter profit cycles designed to enrich individuals and companies regardless of what effects they may have on the larger system and those who serve in its other functions. Greed, no matter how cocky and well-heeled it may appear, is always the direct expression of one unsustainable emotion: fear – the fear of not having or being enough. Sometimes it is seen in the external environment, but much more often the lack is perceived as an internal, personal inadequacy that must be compensated for by getting more and more with the King of the Mountain mindset that destroys all hope of social, economic, and environmental balance and jeopardizes survival of the species.

This is a call to action. Achieving emotional sustainability in business requires the courage to value team members' personal feelings about their work and their organization as critical data that must inform all decision-making. Learning how to contribute and incorporate these feelings in the workflow effectively is a skill as new as iPods. Both teams and leaders need education, training, and practice. The pioneers at Collaborative Growth can facilitate your process. The Team Emotional Social Intelligence Survey (TESI) and the EQi 2.0 can measure your progress. Stay tuned for more examples of the innovative potential for building sustainable organizations when the core skills of the TESI and EQI 2.0 are used together. These highly effective strategies for developing an emotionally sustainable workplace are available and critical to our success as a civilization.