

Mining for Emotional Intelligence

Marcia Hughes and James Terrell

Chi! Chi! Chi! Le! Le! Le!! Inspiration, open heart, courage, hope. Countless emotional terms are associated with the October 14th, 2010 rescue of the 33 Chilean miners who have a lot to teach us about emotional intelligence. Let us reflect on the many emotions and experiences as guides into our own self-awareness. While the 33 miners survived and learned to thrive without most that we take for granted, we've been above ground with the sun, water, wind, earth, loved ones, and easy access to great varieties of daily experience. How happy have you been during that time? How grateful? We invite you to inquire personally by asking how well you've lived during those 69 days. You probably had it easier than the miners - did you live with grace, humility, courage, respect for one another, love and humor? The richness of the miner's experience and the world's response will be teaching us about individuals, teams, organizations and humanity for many years. The fact that the miners survived and came to the surface amazingly healthy is one of the best teachers about emotional and social intelligence you will find. Notice and learn.

Team emotional intelligence requires a view that it's about US rather than about ME. Luis Urzua, Shift Captain, performed as an amazing leader, helping guide the rationing of food, lights and other supplies. His leadership is remarkable, and he's the first to acknowledge that many others were leaders as well. Those watching the miners emerge saw energy and gifts from each person including Mario Sepulveda's humor in leading a cheer and giving rocks as gifts, Omar Reygadas' spirituality and Franklin Lopus' kicking a soccer ball around. It's likely that all team members contributed in their own way to building and sustaining faith throughout the ordeal. They created a society with sufficient structure and adherence to rules to keep everyone alive and relatively healthy, and created a sense of purpose and possibility of miracles.

We've written about how much more skills a team leader needs because his/her job requires both technical and relationship skills. Team leaders need to understand budgets, organizational culture and how to show up using their own emotional intelligence skills while also managing and coaching the EI skills of team members. Focus on the miners: Urzua is a shift boss in an underground mining operation and all of a sudden he is the leader of a team of hungry, anxious people, not sure if they will



live and dwelling in a cramped, dark, moist, hot tomb a half mile underground. He did an amazing job, but he couldn't have done it alone. It took the agreement from all the men to build a sufficiently cooperative unit to survive and surface as whole humans.

The way they appear to have engaged the seven skills of the Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Survey® (TESI®) create a useful inquiry into their engagement. Think about how your team might work with these seven core skills in times of adversity.

1. Team identity – they created this by necessity they knew their purpose – above all survival. Their identity was greatly augmented once it was discovered they were alive and they began to know the eyes of the world were on them as a whole team.
2. Emotional awareness – one miner talked about meeting both God and the devil down below and being grateful for surfacing with God. They were deeply exposed to one another's emotions. While we often find organizations wondering how much they should talk about or work with emotions, there was no doubt here. Just like the full acknowledgement that athletic teams work with their emotions as they compete, it was unquestioned worldwide that emotions were abundant in the mine. The question was how they managed the emotions, not whether they were present.
3. Motivation – does it get any bigger than life or death? Yet they could have fought incessantly out of fear. They didn't. This team had a choice and so does your team.
4. Communication – certainly it took very concrete communication to share such little food for the first seventeen days. Then it seemed like much of the world became involved. Communication happened by some singing, Elvis Presley songs and more, some by a focus on faith, some by health awareness. Full team functioning requires a great web of varied communications.
5. Stress Tolerance – learning to manage their stress was at the core of surviving. They did it, and it couldn't have been easy. They could move around to other parts of the mine, get exercise, and after awhile each had health consultants and others to talk with. Still, isn't it humbling to think of what you might have grumbled about causing you stress sometime in the 69 day period when you had so very much freedom?
6. Conflict Resolution – the potential conflict in fighting over resources and attitudes was enormous. Yet they maintained peace. It seems miraculous. How many

struggles has your team had recently? Could they make it through this level challenge? Some suggest that when the challenges become really dire it's easier to solve conflicts, perhaps because people can't afford to be petty. You don't want to get in this extreme challenge to solve conflict, however. How is your team doing in solving conflict? What skills are you contributing?

7. Positive Mood -- some exercised, ran the mine, sang, or prayed. They found ways to believe they would live and keep helping one another believe. Neuroscientist Candace Pert says it's not that seeing is believing, but believing is seeing. The 33 miners believed they would be rescued and once again see the sky and it is so!

Thank you for the many ways you care about building better relationships – with yourself, your team, your family and all those you engage with. We saw the world come together as so many contributed skills and resources to rescue the miners. Work with your team and family to come together and accomplish your own local miracles.