



BEHAVIORAL EQ® Explorations

Empathy and Openness

TRACOM's Behavioral EQ Model™ is based on the latest research in both brain function and performance. It focuses on the most important elements of Emotional Intelligence and those that can be successfully developed. The Model consists of four dimensions which house the fifteen various core competencies. The Behavioral EQ Explorations series takes a closer look each of these core competencies. This whitepaper focuses on Empathy and Openness.

Empathy and Openness is a crucial element of TRACOM's Behavioral EQ Model. It measures the ability to consider someone else's perspective and display openness to others' viewpoints. People who have heightened Empathy and Openness actively seek out others' opinions and thus, are largely aware of others' perspectives, interact effectively with others and develop meaningful relationships due to their awareness and understanding of others.

“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care” — Theodore Roosevelt



What is Empathy/Openness and Why is it so Important?

When facilitating learning programs, we ask people to describe their most frustrating moments at work – the things that really get under their skin and destroy motivation. Inevitably, two of the top “emotional triggers,” as we call them, are feeling unappreciated and unheard. Think about the last time you put a lot of effort into a project, something that made you proud of your efforts, only to feel deflated by the lack of recognition from your boss or others. And how about those times when people just didn’t seem to notice you were even there? Maybe it was during a meeting when you tried to verbalize your opinions, but nobody appeared to notice or care.

There’s a reason why feeling unappreciated and unheard are so distressing to us. When we feel this way, a section of our brain called the amygdala is activated. The amygdala is the part of the brain responsible for the stress response. When it’s activated, stress hormones are released into the bloodstream creating the “fight or flight” response. This means that feeling disrespected at work results in the same physiological stress that we experience when our lives are in danger!

Scenarios like this are all too common, and while it’s nobody’s intention to make someone feel this way, by practicing empathy and openness, those types of situations can be largely prevented. Being empathetic and open simply means considering someone else’s perspective; being mindful of others, open and interested in their viewpoints. And while it’s easy to remember when people weren’t showing empathy towards us, it’s harder to remember the times when we were guilty of not being empathetic with others. Unfortunately, it’s a common human bias that we are not always good judges of our own behavior and don’t see ourselves clearly. This can be a significant problem since empathy is a critical skill for working effectively with others.

Many business leaders now consider empathy to be one of the most important skills for effective leadership. In his classic *Harvard Business Review* article, “What Makes a Great Leader,” Daniel Goleman said “Leaders with empathy do more than sympathize with people around them: they use their knowledge to improve their companies in subtle, but important ways, by thoughtfully considering employees’ feelings – along with other factors – in the process of making intelligent decisions.”

How to Enhance Empathy and Openness

Since empathy is so important and many of us are not as mindful as we should be about how we interact with others, here are some strategies for increasing your empathy. These strategies are so simple you can easily incorporate them into your daily routine. With practice, they will become habits.

- **Slow down**

One of the biggest barriers to understanding others is simply not taking the time to do it! In practical terms, this means suspending your own needs and focusing fully on the other person, if only briefly. It's easy to get caught up in the frantic pace of work, but focusing on someone else takes only a few minutes. In fact, research shows that brief meaningful encounters help people to feel connected and recognized.ⁱ When interacting with someone, listen intently to what they say and be aware of your emotional triggers – certain words or comments that induce stress and cause your mind to wander. For example, a subordinate who addresses you a little too informally, uses language that is too casual, or misuses particular words. These triggers get in the way of active listening and empathy. It is human nature to make quick judgments and decisions, so be cognizant of this tendency and maintain an open mindset. When possible, take some time to reflect on what others say before making decisions or acting. Remember, empathy does not always lead to agreement. You can disagree with someone but still show empathy and openness when discussing the agreement.

- **Listen more and talk less**

This goes hand-in-hand with the previous strategy. For many people, especially leaders, it's human nature to talk more than they listen. Leaders somehow feel it's their duty to be the "main event," especially during meetings. The problem, of course, is that you can't understand others unless you listen to them. Further, research shows that good listening skills lead to trust from others. When people sense that their leaders and colleagues are listening them, they are more likely to feel that these people have their best interests at heart. So make it a point to consciously talk less during your next meeting or individual encounters, and offer "air time" to others.ⁱⁱ At first this might feel a little awkward, but you'll get used to it. Depending on how much of an issue listening has been for you in the past, others might feel a little uncomfortable with it as well, and that's okay too, they'll also get used to it. Over time, people will feel more comfortable expressing themselves and you just might learn some things you weren't privy to previously.

- **Ask for input**

This final bit of advice is perhaps the easiest to incorporate into your daily routine. There is no better way to understand what others are thinking and feeling than to ask them. The important thing to remember is to do this in a neutral, non-threatening way. For example, during meetings ask "What are your thoughts or concerns about this?" instead of "Any questions?" If you ask the right types of questions, you are almost certain to get people's opinions.

About TRACOM Group's Behavioral EQ Model™:

TRACOM Group's Behavioral EQ Model is the third generation of Emotional Intelligence, focusing on skills that are most related to performance and that can be practiced and developed. This model encompasses emotional intelligence (this refers to how well we perceive and understand our own emotions and the emotions of others) and behavioral intelligence (this refers to how well we manage personal behavior and relationships). Behavioral elements of our Behavioral EQ model are the most important because these skills are visible to others and most strongly predictive of job performance and career success.

Learn more about TRACOM's Behavioral EQ Model and the other elements that comprise the model [here](#).

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