

# **The role of high emotional intelligence in networking**

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Let me start by telling you a short true story.

A young man after finishing school pursued a law degree. Having completed his degree he decided not to pursue a career in the area and set up a carpet cleaning business. Twenty years later he had occasion to require the assistance of a legal team. One of his colleagues pointed out that he had a distinct advantage that he would obviously deploy the services of the best in his class. He sat back and thought for a few minutes and then said “No, everyone qualified as a lawyer but there are only a few who can communicate effectively, persuade the judge and jury and more. I will choose someone with high emotional intelligence”.

In networking too emotional intelligence is a must. Those with strong emotional intelligence will succeed and higher success than those with lower emotional intelligence. A person with high IQ can write a great business plan with only those with high EQ (emotional intelligence quotient) can make it happen. The good news however is that emotional intelligence can be changed in as short a period as 3 months with relevant focus.

Many of you will already be aware of the concept of emotional intelligence and its importance in leadership. Being a great networker is a critical competency of a successful leader. Networking is “an array of non cognitive (emotional and social) capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures”.

Emotional intelligence can galvanise you and enable you to take full advantage of your potential. Nowhere is this more important than in networking. While networking we continuously need to be able to take advantage of opportunities while also creating and developing new ones. It has been noted that one common trait of unsuccessful CEO’s is that they place strategy before people. Successful CEO’s shine in emotional intelligence – they show integrity, people acumen, assertiveness, effective communication and trust building behaviour – just like the lawyer that our carpet cleaner friend choose to represent him.

Let’s look at why emotional intelligence is so important in networking. A fundamental trait of a good CEO is to be an excellent networker and good CEO’s have great emotional intelligence. There are common threads between both. For those who are excellent networkers the competencies of emotional intelligence shine through. These people reap the rewards getting a measurable return on their time and subscriptions.

Emotional Intelligence has a number of realms. Let’s look at these individually with networking in mind.



### *Intra Personal Realm*

The intrapersonal realm in Emotional Intelligence includes self-regard, Emotional self-awareness, assertiveness and independence as well as self-actualisation. All, without exception of these competencies are required to be a good networker. Similarly, by enhancing networking skills individuals will improve their Emotional Intelligence in each of these areas. This will enhance their personal leadership skills and give individuals a competitive advantage in the workplace.

One of the fundamentals of success is based on knowing yourself, living and working independently, having confidence in expressing your beliefs and ideas. There are all vital in being a successful networker.

In networking

- It is vital to have positive **self regard** and to have the ability to respect and accept your strengths and weaknesses. It is only when we recognise our strengths that we can maximize them and minimise our weaknesses.
- We must have pride in our company and in our products. If we do not have pride in our own products that we are promoting, it will be very difficult to engage with others in promoting these products. High regard for our employers and products is important.
- With high self regard it is more likely we will read a situation correctly. We must be able to identify if a prospect is interested in our products and if a meeting might be of value. Emotional Intelligence helps us identify this.
- Positive **emotional awareness** ensuring that we use positive language which has a positive effect on our networking results. I in still in people I train and coach to remove all words of ambiguity. Nobody wants to do business with anyone who “kinda” does something – they wish to engage with “experts in the field”.
- With greater **self esteem** and confidence, we are more effective at networking the room with ease as well as having the ability to move on and meet the next prospect.

- Greater self awareness allows us to set challenging goals and deliver on them. A key performance indicator for an effective networker. Though awareness we will also be aware of our strengths and be able to suggest new enhancements to people and companies where we can assist. These are often ideas that were not previously thought of and can therefore open up great opportunities.
- **Assertiveness** is a vital ingredient of emotional intelligence. It is our ability to express and defend our feelings and beliefs as well as thoughts in a constructive way. Of course, it is important not to mix this competency with aggressiveness. Assertiveness is our ability in networking to get our point across. Therefore we must know in 10 words or so our elevator pitch. We must be able to communicate a reason for the person I am engaging with to wish to schedule a meeting to expand the conversation. Developing assertiveness will give you a great skill with which to succeed.
- Assertiveness also ensures we work the room, follow up and seek out new opportunities. Assertiveness is also linked to perseverance.
- Without a level of **independence** we will not network effectively. Independent people are self-reliant in planning and making important decisions. Independence is important in networking as we must be assertively independent at all events we attend or indeed in all our below-the-radar networking activities.
- However, it must be noted that overly independent people become isolated or controlling. Therefore a balance of independence is required to be a good networker and is closely correlated to flexibility. We must be independent but not controlling. Listening is key as we only learn by listening.
- Those who are independent while networking will have the ability to take control of a situation. They will pick up the phone regularly to make contact. Hello calls and regular contact are very important. Therefore it is important to have a pre-designed follow-up strategy for our contacts and connections. It is easy to follow up once. The challenge is maintaining regular follow-up that is effective and has a measured return on the investment of time and subscriptions.
- **Self-actualisation** is another important trait in networking. Those high in this trait will ensure they learn not only about the network but about all the members. These people will attract suitable clients and will be full of passion, enthusiasm and zest for life. Those with high self-actualisation will learn at networking events – learn about their competitors, learn about market expectations – all this learning should be ammunition for improved service and improved products leading to further competitive advantages for the organisation or firm.
- This zest is important when networking which is linked closely to optimism. Let's face it very few of us want to do business with "grim, grim and grimmer"!



### **Inter Personal Realm**

Where the intra personal realm focuses on “you” and how you communicate with yourself. The interpersonal realm focuses on communication with others. The elements of this realm are interpersonal relationships, social responsibility and empathy.

It is important to develop the competencies of the intra personal realm before going to networking events so as to get maximum gain quickly and then while at the events to build on these competencies to make them personal competitive advantages. Already from these actions you will see you emotional intelligence improves significantly.

Let’s look at the competencies of the Interpersonal realm with networking in mind.

- Those with excellent **interpersonal skills** make great networkers as they are comfortable and competent in relation to meeting others – they are people focussed. They will facilitate others and are great team players. This all leads to greater returns from networking.
- **Empathy** is a key ingredient. Put simply it is “putting yourself in the other person’s shoes”. By understanding the perspective of another person we can help them or refer them more effectively. Empathy creates strong collaborative relationships. Collaboration is the future of business and the essence of networking. No man is an island – the sum is greater than each of the individual parts.
- Those high in **empathy tend to be great listeners**. They listen with their whole being and not thinking what to say next. They place the speaker at the centre of the interaction. It is always about the other person which is very important in networking. A phrase called “givers gain” is widely acknowledged in professional networking circles.
- **Social responsibility** too is important. It is important when networking to act in a responsible manner, even though you may not benefit personally. Again remember the interaction is about the other person. They are at the centre of the relationship.
- Those with high social responsibility give to the group and are responsible and dependable as well as concerned about others. Networkers with high social responsibility are an asset to the group. In fact those with overall high emotional intelligence are a “must” for any group or team as they make sure things get one.

- Of course the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships is a given. This includes giving and receiving, feeling at ease in social relations as well as having a positive outlook towards change.

It is important for networkers with high interpersonal relationship traits to ensure they are networking and not socialising. The word networking has the word “work” embedded as it is work. If we wish to connect with those we know and have a chat this is socialising and can be done at home or in our local hostelry.

It is also worth noting that those with high interpersonal relationship traits might have the risk of being too revealing. Therefore if you feel this might be a weakness if you are high in this realm this might be something to watch.

On the plus side those with excellent skills in this area build relationships of trust and spend more time on relationship development paying long term dividends. They will feel at ease asking “how things are going” – they show a sense of caring. They develop trustful meaningful relationships. In networking “hello” calls and follow up are important and those who develop this realm of competencies will score highly in business networking.

I have never met a successful hermit. Have you? There are very few if any successful hermits. Part of the success in networking is the ability to cultivate and develop meaningful relationships with others. Close interpersonal relationships add to the richness of life.

Interpersonal relationships and all the elements of emotional intelligence are particularly in demand in times of economic slowdown. This is how business is generated more and more. People purchase from people they have met and can trust or people whom are referred to them. Networking and Emotional Intelligence are therefore two vital competencies to develop in staff for sustainable growth.

## Stress Management



Stresses occur in all areas of work. Regrettably, networking does not escape! With Emotional Intelligence we learn to navigate through stress.

Networking can be stressful especially when combined with a busy schedule and therefore it is important that we have good stress management techniques in place. As previously mentioned networking is “work” and therefore adequate time must be allocated. This is often a failing many have – they rush to the event and don’t allocate time for preparation and for follow up. I believe every networking event takes approximately 1 day including follow up calls, follow up meetings and preparation. A good rule of thumb is to allocate 20% of time towards networking activities – translating into 1 day per week or an hour per day. Of course, it is also important to remember this could be internal networking as much as external networking and can include networking for reasons other than for business development. In the current market a lot of people use networking a key tool towards obtaining gainful employment.

The stress tolerance realm of Emotional Intelligence is made up of stress tolerance and impulse control.

- Those with moderate to high **stress tolerance** have the ability to remain calm and focussed. Such people can present themselves with confidence and think clearly. This married with excellent interpersonal skills augers well in networking circles.
- Stress tolerance in stressful situations means you will have the capacity to choose the right course of action and have an optimistic disposition towards overcoming problems. It is of vital importance to have an optimistic disposition at networking events. Our energy often draws clients to us.
- **Impulse control** is a key in networking. Whatever the situation it is important that we remain composed and don’t enter into irresponsible behaviour. If a networker has a problem with impulse control it will have a detrimental effect on his/her networking. For one you will not be taken seriously.
- Those with good impulse control have the capacity to think first rather than responding. It allows mental space for weighing up alternatives. This will lead to wise decision making when networking.

In the busy world in which we operate traits of high stress tolerance are important in providing effective coping mechanisms and ensuring we remain stable and relaxed. When networking out potential clients will not be attracted to frazzled stressed burnt out suppliers!

We all suffer from stress at different junctions in our life. It is important to develop appropriate techniques for stress tolerance and impulse control. If we are particularly stressed in a particular week it might be more advisable to take a rest from networking and to recharge batteries rather than have a situation that might be irreversible. Long term individuals need to assess the need to develop these two areas for the purposes of their overall Emotional Intelligence and their networking performance.

### Adaptability



Adaptability involves our ability to be flexible and realistic and to solve a range of problems as they arise. Success in this realm means that you as a networker can grasp potential client challenges and give effective solutions.

Adaptability is a must. Never before has there been so much change. Technology is changing. Attitudes are changing. We must adapt to this change. In networking change happens regularly in that different people we meet have different goals. Our businesses are changing by the day. To be effective in business and in networking change management is crucial.

The core ingredients of this Emotional Intelligence realm are reality testing, flexibility and problem solving.

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- **Reality testing** is crucial when evaluating how we can assist client companies or prospective companies. It is our ability to view things the way they are rather than the way we want them to be. Reality allows us to be “tuned in” and practical. Reality allows us to identify who a good connection might be for fellow networkers. It allows us to identify who we can effectively help and refer. We must take into consideration the size of organisations, their current workforce, their budgets, their values and a range of other factors. We must be realistic in the delivery of their objectives within defined resources. Though listening to our

fellow networkers we will be able to gain a good bench mark of how we can assist their organisation with “reality”.

- With good reality testing when **problem solving** we will think factually and not allow our emotions to cloud our judgement. We will also put focus on tangible deliverables ensuring goal delivery. In essence reality testing with problem solving results in a solutions approach. This results in a WIN WIN for all.
- **Flexibility** could not be more important than in networking. Our ability to solve individual problems of a personal and interpersonal nature required flexibility. With flexibility we adjust emotions, thoughts and behaviours to changing situations in an unpredictable and dynamic set of situations.
- Those with flexibility are agile and capable of reacting to change. When networking it is important to continuously “move on” and to change networking partner so to speak. Flexibility is key.
- With flexibility networkers are open and tolerant of new ideas. Those without flexibility adapt poorly to new situations and do not have the ability to take advantage of new opportunities.
- It is important to have a balance in terms of flexibility – if you are overly flexible you might well be taken advantage of. There for it is often important to think when I say “yes” to something what am I saying “no” to in a personal and professional capacity.
- Problem solving networkers have the ability to define problem and then move to generate and implement effective and appropriate solutions. Problem solving will have a key role in your follow up approach.

Adaptability is of the essence when networking as we need to be solutions driven and be flexible around our colleague’s needs and requirements while making a realistic referral or proposal.

## General Mood



General mood is a combination of optimism and happiness. Optimism refers to the long term where happiness is the here and now. We may attend a networking eventful of optimism where as we may be unhappy due to receiving some bad news.

- Those with high **general mood** are cheerful about life and are generally solutions focussed. People wish to be around people and work with people with high general mood and therefore another key ingredient to networking. Remember first impressions count! People are attracted to positive people with an upbeat disposition.
- Those with high optimism usually succeed in life. They know that bad times won't last. Even if a networking event has not delivered the results required they will assess what they have learned from the network, how to make the network better or to move to a network more aligned to their target audience.
- Happy people are approachable to other networkers and they attract connections. Those with good general mood generally give more referrals and the law of reciprocity says the more we give the more we receive of "2+2=5".
- Happy people enjoy the company of others and thoroughly enjoy networking and this radiates through. They make "networking friends" and "referral friends". They feel at ease with others. They are excellent networkers. Generally speaking they have other realms of emotional intelligence which is high.

In summary, networking and emotional intelligence are closely entwined. All the competencies of Emotional Intelligence are required to be a superb networker. We can continuously improve our Emotional Intelligence and by doing so we will improve our networking ability.

The converse is also true by improving our networking skills, our Emotional Intelligence will improve. By being an effective networker we will improve each of our EQ competencies.

Both Emotional Intelligence and Networking are key ingredients of successful leadership and business performance. It must be remember that networking is not always about getting leads. It can also be about sourcing a job, working with stakeholders, working with investors, business partners or obtaining competitive or valuable information. A necessary strategy for executives is to improve both of these competencies.

The good news is that Emotional Intelligence with focus and direction can be improved in about 100 days. Networking is personal marketing which is a science and therefore it can be learned.

### **About Caitlin O'Connor**

Caitlin is widely acknowledged as one of the leading experts in networking, lead generation and marketing. She has a passion for empowering people to take control and action through learning. Her programmes are exhilarating and energy charged while being results orientated. Accelerating Performance was founded in 2005 to stimulate growth through forward thinking. Caitlin is an Ambassador with Dublin Chamber of Commerce and on the Board of IIBN. In 2010 she published a learning resource on networking which is CPD accredited called "Engage Lead Generation through Networking". Caitlin is a regular contributor to radio and is retained by a number of MBA programmes.

**For more information about Caitlin and Accelerating Performance, please click here:**  
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