

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The importance of emotional intelligence in healthcare is being increasingly recognized.

IQ and technical skills are important but mainly as 'threshold capabilities' ie they are the minimum expectations for positions.

Without emotional intelligence a person can have a bright analytical mind and an endless supply of smart ideas but they are still not as effective as emotionally intelligent people.

The five areas of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill) have been extensively reviewed by Daniel Goleman.

It's been shown that people who are emotionally intelligent are more productive, achieve more, are better team members and are generally better people to be around and this flows through to more effective and more productive teams and organizations.

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. People with strong self-awareness are honest with themselves and with others. They are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. They recognize how their feelings affect them, other people and their job performance.

People with high self-awareness are candid and have an ability to assess themselves realistically. They are able to speak accurately and openly about their emotions and the impact they have on their work.

Self-aware people know, and are comfortable talking about, their limitations and strengths and demonstrate a thirst for constructive criticism. By contrast people with low self-awareness interpret the message that they need to improve as a threat or a sign of failure.

2. SELF-REGULATION

The key to successful self-regulation is the ability to control or redirect impulses and moods together with the ability to think before acting. Successful self-regulators still feel bad moods and emotional impulses, just as everyone else does, however they find ways to control them.

Self-regulation is important in healthcare because people who are in control of their feelings and impulses (ie people who are reasonable) are able to create an environment of trust.

In today's fast-moving and ever-changing healthcare environment people who have mastered their emotions are able to roll with the changes.

When a new initiative is announced they don't panic. Instead they are able to suspend judgment, seek out information and listen to others.

People with emotional self-regulation therefore have a propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness; comfort with ambiguity and change; and integrity – an ability to say no to impulsive urges.

Self-regulation also enhances integrity – both personal and organizational. Many bad actions that happen in organisations are a function of impulsive behaviour. People don't necessarily plan to lie, exaggerate, or misrepresent situations. When an opportunity presents itself people with low impulse control just say yes. By contrast people with high levels of self-regulation challenge impulses and build lasting relationships based on trust.



3. MOTIVATION

Effective people are driven to achieve beyond expectations – their own and everyone else's. Many people are motivated by external factors (big salaries, impressive titles, being part of a prestigious organisation) however those with high EQ are motivated by a deeply embedded desire to achieve for the sake of achievement. These people have a passion for the work itself, they seek out creative challenges, they love to learn and they take great pride in a job well done. They are often restless with the status quo, want to do things better and are eager to explore new approaches to their work.

People who are driven to achieve are forever raising the performance bar. People who are driven to do better also want a way of tracking progress – their own, their teams and their organisations.

Whereas people with low achievement motivation are often fuzzy about results, those with high achievement motivation often keep score by tracking such hard measures as KPIs and results.

People with high motivation remain optimistic when situations are against them. In such cases self-regulation combines with achievement motivation to overcome the frustration that comes after a setback or failure.



4. EMPATHY

People with empathy understand the emotional make-up of other people – they know what people are feeling. People with empathy are attuned to subtleties in body language – they can hear the message beneath the words being spoken.

Empathy means thoughtfully considering other's feelings, along with other factors, in the process of making intelligent decisions.

It doesn't mean adopting other people's emotions as one's own and trying to please everybody – because that would make action impossible.

In a team based healthcare environment empathy is an important component of success. Within teams everyone must be able to sense and understand the view points of others and to encourage them to speak openly about their feelings.



SAMPLE QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Tell me about yourself.
How would your colleagues describe you?

Tell me about your strengths and your limitations.
Tell me about a time when you received feedback.

Tell me about a time when you had a great success.
Tell me about a time when you made a big mistake.

2. SELF-REGULATION

How do you handle stressful situations?
How do you relax?

Tell me about a time when you got angry. What did you do?
When do you feel most under pressure?

How do you handle multiple demands?
How do you achieve work/life balance?

3. MOTIVATION

What motivates you?
Why do you work?
How do you measure success?

What results do you achieve?
Tell me about some challenging goals you have set?

How do you overcome obstacles and setbacks?
What do you do to stay up-to-date with developments in your sector?

5. SOCIAL SKILL

Social skill is not just a matter of friendliness, rather social skill is friendliness with a purpose – moving people in the direction you desire.

Socially skilled people tend to have a wide circle of acquaintances and they find common ground with people of all kinds. It doesn't mean that they socialize continually but it does mean that they work according to the assumption that nothing important gets done alone. Such people have a network in place when the time for action comes.

Social skill is the culmination of the other dimensions of emotional intelligence. People tend to be very effective at managing relationships when they can understand and control their own emotions and can empathize with the feelings of others.

Socially skilled people are adept at managing teams.

They are expert persuaders – a manifestation of self-awareness, self-regulation and empathy combined. Good persuaders know when to make an emotional plea and when an appeal to reason will work better. Motivation makes such people excellent collaborators – their passion for the work spreads to others and they are driven to find solutions.

Socially skilled people may at times appear not to be working at work. They are chatting in the corridors with colleagues or joking around with people who are not even connected to their 'real jobs'. Socially skilled people don't think that it makes sense to arbitrarily limit the scope of their relationships. They build bonds widely because they know that in these fluid times they may need help someday from people they are just getting to know today.

Because of the added value of employing emotionally intelligent candidates the question is often asked; "How can we assess someone's emotional intelligence during the interview and selection process?"

There are a number of psychological tests to score candidates against the various dimensions however one of the most effective ways is to ask them relevant questions and then probe for additional insight.

Grouped into the 5 categories of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill these questions can be modified depending on whether the situation is an interview or a reference check.



4. EMPATHY

Describe a time when you had to deliver difficult news.

What do you do when someone comes to you with a problem?

Describe the people in your team and discuss what they need and how they feel.

Describe a time when understanding someone else's perspective helped you understand them better.

What do you do to understand someone else's behavior?

How do you understand what your team members are feeling?

5. SOCIAL SKILL

Tell me about a time when you needed to influence someone.

Describe a difficult issue you had to deal with.

Tell me about what you would do to gain respect as a new manager.

Tell me how you build networks within your organisation.

How do you develop rapport with people?

How do you build relationships with people?

5. SOCIAL SKILL

In summary, people with emotional intelligence have self awareness – they know their strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and impact on others. They have self-regulation – they control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods. They have motivation – they relish achievement for its own sake. They have empathy – they understand other people’s emotional make-up. And they have social skill – they build rapport with others to move them in desired directions.

Emotional intelligence is a core capability for success in healthcare. The first three components of emotional intelligence are self-management skills. The last two – empathy and social skill, concern a person’s ability to manage relationships with others. Successful people strengthen these abilities through persistence, practice and feedback.

