Why emotional intelligence is needed by hotel engineers

There is nothing warm and fuzzy about an emotionally intelligent engineer.

By RACHEL GREEN

When I grew up I was encouraged to hide and control my emotions, as though they were something bad. When I was first employed I understood I was not to take them to work with me and I was to factor them OUT of any decisions I made. Sound familiar?

Nowadays, people talk about emotional intelligence and say that emotions DO matter. Do they, and if so, why? How can emotions possibly have any relevance to the work of hotel engineers?

Let’s roll the clocks back to 1990. At that time two leading USA psychologists, Professors Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer coined the term “emotional intelligence”. They’d been investigating what else, in addition to IQ, could help explain or predict people’s successful adaptation to life.

You and I are both familiar with the IQ factory production line. It predicts that if you go to school, prove that you’re brainy, pass all your exams and graduate from college or university, your life will be successful.

However, it turns out that this is not always the case. Instead, Salovey, Mayer and others noticed that some people with really high IQs fell by the wayside. They would end up in abusive relationships, become alcoholics or find themselves broke, unemployed or in jail.

I am sure we all know people who are very well educated and have high IQs but who, for example, are unpleasant to deal with, socially inept or unable to work well in a team.

One of the factors that Salovey and Mayer found contributed to how well people managed their lives was their ability to be aware of and manage their own and others’ emotions, hence the term “emotional intelligence”.

Before explaining this further it is important to say that EI complements IQ; it doesn’t replace it. IQ is still important, as are technical skills. No one wants an engineer, architect or electrician who is not technically competent. In addition, people’s personalities, cultural backgrounds, life experiences, ages, religious beliefs, genders and luck also contribute to their success, as does their emotional intelligence.

These researchers and their colleagues went on to discover that emotional intelligence was not just an important influence on life generally, but there was also a significant correlation between higher levels of emotional intelligence and success at work. The found that emotional intelligence could have a profound effect on the way people work and how productive they are.

Australian research conducted by Dr Ben Palmer and Professor Con Stough, from Swinburne University in Melbourne, for instance, found that employees who have higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to cope with organisational stress, have less absenteeism and higher job satisfaction.

In other words, people with lower levels of emotional intelligence could be having a detrimental effect on your bottom line. How much does absenteeism cost your workplace?

In case you don’t think emotions are relevant at work, what about feeling determined, motivated, loyal, confident or appreciated? If your staff, contractors, colleagues and even yourself, felt such emotions they would impact on work output, wouldn’t they? If I have still not convinced you would it make any difference to productivity if you, your staff or contractors felt complacent, apathetic, disconnected, unwanted, shafted, stressed or disengaged? Yes!
Emotions do matter at work. Which ones you foster could make a big difference to getting your projects completed on time, on budget and to specification.

Your skills in emotional intelligence will influence the effectiveness of your self-management skills, how well you read other people, and how efficiently you manage and influence people. Suffice it to say ignoring emotions may be possible but there are negative consequences if you do.

There are increasing amounts of economic data that demonstrate that people with higher levels of emotional intelligence economically outperform those who have lower levels of EI. I don’t just mean in terms of their pay packets, but also in terms of annual business turnover, increased sales, customer loyalty, etc.

For example, David Rosette, from the University of Wollongong, found that, “Executives who achieved superior business outcomes scored higher on the EI ability test. The ability measure of EI predicted effective leadership over and above well-established workplace measures such as reasoning ability and personality...”.

Can you afford to be without it?

What is emotional intelligence?

Let me give you a brief definition of what emotional intelligence is and then explain how else this may help you as a hotel engineer.

I will use the definition of Palmer and Stough, as their model focuses on the workplace. They say that: “Emotional intelligence is the skill with which you perceive, express, reason with and manage your own and others’ emotions.”

Their Genos model of emotional intelligence covers seven dimensions:

1. Emotional self-awareness: The ability to identify your emotions.
2. Emotional expression: The ability to express your emotions clearly.
3. Emotional awareness of others: The skill of perceiving and understanding others’ emotions.
4. Reasoning with emotions: The skill of utilising accurate emotional information in decision-making. (This is not the same as making emotional decisions.)
5. Emotional self-management: The ability to manage your emotions.
6. Emotional management of others: The skill of influencing the emotions of others.

There are many different skills involved and everyone is likely to be more or less skilled in each dimension.

How skilled are you?

What emotional intelligence isn’t.

It’s also important to clarify what emotional intelligence isn’t. At many of my presentations I get predictable cheeky remarks, such as “We’re in for a group hug are we Rachel?” and “Are you going to make us warm and fuzzy?” Thanks for thinking I had the power to do this, but no! Fortunately, it isn’t what emotional intelligence is about.

There is nothing warm or fuzzy about feeling angry, anxious, resentful, frustrated, scared, cheated or powerless, yet these are all emotions, and all emotions that occur in association with hotel facilities. Emotional intelligence involves the full range of emotions, not just so-called “positive” ones.

Similarly, emotional intelligence is not about making people happy, or saying “yes” to people. Nor is it about being emotional. Being emotional may be no more intelligent than ignoring or repressing emotions.

Why do emotions matter for hotel engineers?

Emotions are at the core of emotional intelligence. Emotions are drivers of behaviour – even in engineers. At the conference I demonstrated this quite simply by using three examples. In one I asked how many people knew all the health information on how much exercise, sleep and alcohol were good for them. Naturally, of course, everyone knew this; it’s in the media on a daily basis. Everyone had the cognitive knowledge they needed to make informed and rational decisions about their health.

Then I asked, “How many of you do all these things?” It turned out hardly anyone did.

When we discussed why not a variety of reasons were produced and most were based around emotions. “Exercise is too boring” someone said. “Does this mean that if you’re bored by it you avoid healthy exercise?” I asked. “Yes” he said. “In which case your emotions are driving your behaviour, not your cognition, as boredom is an emotion”, I replied.

Here was a group of highly intelligent (IQ) engineers making emotional and unhealthy decisions even though they had the knowledge to make healthier ones. Why is this? Because behaviour is mostly driven by emotions.

The decision to act on what we know comes from emotions. When we feel convinced or excited (emotions) we may act. When we feel disinterested or complacent (emotions), we may not.

In the second example, we moved on to imagine that a car had cut in front of us in the traffic. “What would you do?” I asked.

The replies included gesturing, yelling and various retaliatory behaviours such as horn blowing and tail-gating. “Why would you do this when it’s safer to simply slow down?” I enquired.

Ah! It turned out that the gestures and yelling were because they felt indignant, angry, anxious, put-out or scared. Emotions were the drivers of their behaviour.

Finally I asked, “Last night at the conference, how many of you drank more than you knew you ought to?” Many hands went up. Why? Their responses included, “It feels good”, “I like it”, “It relaxes me”, “I like the taste” and “It’s comforting”. Yes, emotions drive behaviour in engineers just as in all other people.

As Joshua Freedman states, “Emotions can lead to our worst decisions or our best ones: the difference is emotional intelligence.”

Practical applications of emotional intelligence – for hotel engineers managing staff.

How does any of this relate to your work? The key is that emotions influence people to act in the way that they do. This means that if someone behaves on the job in a
certain way, be they male or female; the engineer, accountant or architect; the contractors, consultants or staff; the behaviour is often driven by emotions.

Thus, if you want to influence or change people’s behaviours when you are planning, developing or maintaining a hotel then look for and manage the emotions UNDER their behaviour.

For example, I once helped a manager who had two members of staff who weren’t talking to each other. He had called them into his office and laid down the rules about workplace communication and what he expected of them. In other words he gave them knowledge. You’ve guessed it, haven’t you? Their behaviour didn’t change.

When I came in I helped him plan a meeting with them to talk about the feelings that were going on underneath the behaviour. It turned out that one of the women had held an afternoon tea in the staff room, and had not invited the other one.

His first step was to ask, “How did you feel?” The woman who was not invited had felt slighted, ignored and hurt. Unable to tell the other woman this she had instead fallen into resentment, sulking and back-stabbing.

The second step the manager took was to ask her how she’d like to feel. The woman who had felt ignored said, “Included”.

The third step the manager carried out was to ask, “What could be done to help you feel included?” Between them they came up with some practical solutions. The problem was solved. No, the manager hadn’t become a counsellor he had merely used emotional intelligence skills to get the two women to sort out the problem and improve their behaviour.

People issues always involve emotions. Anyone not got people issues to manage? To be able to manage people you need to be aware of and able to manage emotions, yours and theirs.

In case you think your own emotions don’t matter – have you ever avoided giving hard and difficult feedback to someone? If so, why? It’s quite common for people in supervisory, managerial or executive positions to avoid giving honest direct feedback because of their own feelings of discomfort, awkwardness and anxiety. Instead of managing these feelings in an emotionally intelligent way, they simply avoid the situation or soften what they say. Conversely they may brace themselves and carry out the discussions insensitively and harshly.

By being aware of how you feel and managing these feelings well, you have more choice and control over how effective you are.

You may also doubt whether you can control anyone else’s feelings. It is certainly possible. You influence the emotions of the people around you by what you say and do, by what you don’t say or do, and by how you speak and behave. When you influence their emotions you also influence their engagement, their buy-in and their productivity. Emotional Intelligence can make things happen.

Let me give you a recent example.

I was on my way to Sydney to speak at a conference when the airport was closed because of fog. There were thousands of people stranded for hours. Communication from the airlines was poor, and the airport terminal was undergoing renovations and lacking in sufficient seats or toilets. I was sitting between two people who were furious. I could feel their negativity flowing from their bodies into mine. Emotions can be contagious.

I decided to read a book and stayed calm. However, the person next to me became indignant that the Sydney plane was leaving before the Adelaide one. I was pleased to fly and said, “At least it’s good for the Sydney people”, thinking I was being light-hearted.

Did I change his emotions? You bet I did. They got even worse. He seethed!

Quickly I decided to try and improve the situation. I apologised on behalf of Western Australia for the airport being closed. I told him it was very unusual and how sorry I was that he’d got caught up in it. Then I asked him how his holiday was. He said, “We had a wonderful time, we so enjoyed ourselves, we spent 5 days on the beach and loved it”.

Do you think I changed his emotions? Yes! When he started talking about his holiday and re-living the good times his negativity dissolved. I had taken his attention to a happier place.

Do you know the impact that you have on the people around you and how they feel about working for you or with you? It could make the difference between high staff turn-over and staff loyalty. It could help reduce stakeholder conflicts or
increase them. It could bring greater buy-in from suppliers and consultants or result in a lack of co-operation.

**Practical applications of emotional intelligence - for hotel engineers making decisions.**

Level four on the emotional intelligence model is “Reasoning with emotions”. This means factoring in accurate emotional data as part of the decision-making process and not solely relying on cognitive data. If you have been trained to remove all the emotions from a decision and to stick only to “the facts” - you may be limiting your decisions or even making the wrong ones. Emotions are part of “the facts” about people.

Hotels are designed by, built by and maintained by people and for people. Your design, construction and maintenance will impact on the tourists and guests who stay there, the staff involved in the day-to-day running of the hotel, and the owners who are trying to make a profit. That’s a lot of emotions to consider.

On my recent Sydney trip, there were a lot of frustrated guests in our hotel, me included. Why? Because the lifts were frequently out of action or very slow. Worse still, when I needed to go from the conference on level 2 to my room on level 3 I found there were no stairs I could climb. I had to allow at least 15 minutes to “pop” upstairs. The emotions felt by the guests impacted on the ratings given to the conference and the hotel.

Everything a hotel engineer does will impact on someone’s emotions at some stage. Being able to predict and understand these and factoring this information into your planning, along with all the other relevant facts and figures, can help make the best decisions.

**Practical applications of emotional intelligence - when hotel engineers are communicating.**

Let me give you one more example. Let’s imagine a new air-conditioning system has been designed for your hotel. You’re sure it’s the best design. However, some other members of your staff or management want changes that you think are unnecessary. How will you convince them you are right? By bombarding them with facts, figures and costings maybe? What if this doesn’t work? How could applying emotional intelligence skills help?

One step could be to identify how they are feeling. Are they feeling left out of the process and unheard, or are they feeling anxious, frustrated or concerned? Once you have identified their possible emotions then decide how to best explain your decision, taking these emotions into consideration.

For instance, if they feel anxious about the energy consumption you might say, “I know some of you are worried in case the energy consumption is too high. I’d like to present you with the data I’ve collected so you can feel reassured that we’ve reduced total energy consumption by over 30%”.

If in contrast you think they feel unheard, you might say, “I know this process has involved a great number of people and you may be feeling left out. Let’s start by my hearing all your concerns, and then I’ll go through them one step at a time to ensure I’ve understood each one fully”.

By the way, in case you think this is too warm and fuzzy, there is research by Lieberman et al. based on fMRI scans showing that simply naming a feeling can reduce the reactivity in the brain and thus the strength of people’s emotions. If you alter how your stakeholders are feeling you alter the drivers of their behaviour.

How you communicate and how well you predict the emotions of the people you are communicating with can greatly affect the outcomes you achieve and the speed with which you achieve them. Much time can be wasted on trying to change behaviours when the underlying emotions are ignored. Have you ever done that?

**Conclusions**

Emotions drive behaviour. Your skills in managing your own emotions and those of the people around you can influence the outcomes you achieve, the impact you make, and your abilities to inspire, influence and negotiate with your key stakeholders, colleagues, contractors and staff. Bring your emotional intelligence to work with you and develop it to its full potential. There are benefits of being skilled in each dimension of emotional intelligence and ways to develop each of them to a high level in your work.

There is so much to say about emotional intelligence and how to apply the skills in a practical way in your work. This is only a brief overview of the possibilities. I am collating a lot more information on emotional intelligence on my website for you. You are welcome to visit: http://www.rachelgreen.com/emotional-intelligence.html

**References**


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel Green, an award-winning communication specialist, emotional intelligence coach and motivational speaker, has spoken at a recent engineering conference and managed to convince cynical engineers to consider their emotions! As such, we have invited her to write this article. In 2010 she was awarded the highest level of accreditation in the professional speaking profession: Certified Speaking Professional (CSP). She has tertiary qualifications in psychology, speech pathology, adult education and the Feldenkrais method. She is also an accredited user of two emotional intelligence assessments (the Genos and the MSCEIT). Rachel provides keynote speeches, expert seminars and practical 1-1 coaching to professional people in emotional intelligence, communication and networking skills and often works with engineers. Some of her key clients have included the Water Corporation, Western Power, Landcorp, Retirement Villages Association, Institute Hospital Engineers, Fremantle Hospital, Kwinana Power Station, and more. She can be contacted on rachel@rachelgreen.com or 08 9390 1188.