

# Anything but soft; EQ is the key to future business success

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We know the robots are coming, now what? HR departments have their eyes glued to this development. It's essential that we delve deeper into humanity to keep our insights fresh and relevant.



As technology evolves, we're beginning to realise that our humanness is actually our competitive advantage. It's what's going to save us, so these are the skills we need to be focusing on.

Over the years I've worked inside and outside of HR departments. The one question that always crops up is "when will this department share all its wonder with the rest of the business?"

The majority of HR personnel studied either Psychology or HR and did so for one of two reasons. Either their parents wanted

them to study medicine and they didn't get in or more probably, they genuinely love people and want to help them. The challenging thing, however, is that this career path has been tainted with administration, legislation, procedure and exit interviews. But at the root of it all, their need is to support employees' growth, be the voice of the people and help employees realise their full potential.

*“ I could go on about how HR has developed a bad rep for their "big brother" nature, more concerned about leave forms being submitted on time than why an employee has taken 37.5 sick days in one year. Instead, I'll focus on the rapidly approaching change that's forcing HR departments around the world to gear-up. In embracing the digitisation of our workforce, I'll unpack the strongest, yet most underrated of human attributes - EQ. ”*

Seasoned HR professionals agree that EQ is a difficult skill to develop, and as more businesses appreciate its necessity, here are a few ways HR personnel can promote it:

## 1. EQ is anything but "soft"

Emotional intelligence has been labelled the "fluffy stuff", but in reality, it's the essence of our humanity. It differentiates us from AI, bots and other modern technology. It's interesting that for centuries we've been educated and moved into the workforce, robotically completing task after task. Now, more than ever, it's our empathy, awareness, creativity and social intelligence that's critical for our success in the workplace.

With the many companies that have the heavy burden of dealing with an immense amount of change, it's HR that's responsible for the difficult restructuring conversations, grievance issues and all the emotional baggage that comes with it. It takes a certain level of care and compassion to tackle these very tough situations.

## 1. EQ in the hiring process

In order to hire individuals who are future-ready, the recruitment team itself will need a high EQ level. Like recognises like. Teams should be adept and therefore be able to gauge levels of communication, body language, empathy, social intelligence and adaptability. This is crucial to ensure we are empowering the people responsible for interviewing candidates. An interview panel should be able to pick up communication styles and possible gaps or strengths linked to EQ. Having highly developed skills in this area helps reduce the frustration of poor hires.

Assessments are often used in the hiring process, but these aren't often considered from a future-focused perspective. In a recent study on brain-based hiring, adaptability comes out as a key ability of the future's workforce. If we're able to remain agile amidst all circumstances, we're going to be more motivated and productive no matter the environment.

## **1. EQ can be developed over time**

Neuroscience indicates that our brains learn and absorb more in "chunks". Isolated training interventions for a few days that are never revisited won't work. Training needs to take the form of shorter courses, workshops, conferences and inspiration sessions, spread out over a longer period of time, delivered in a format that encourages learning through action. People need to be developed, not trained once-off. If you've hired people who are high on the agility scale, they're going to be more willing to learn, grow and develop.

EQ development sessions should highlight the importance of emotional intelligence while covering critical topics such as conflict resolution, resilience, stress management and empathy. Employees need to learn how to easily discuss diversity with ease, communication skills to handle difficult conversations, resolve conflict with care and verbalise their feelings in a positive way. Research shows that the EQ strength of a team is directly related to their productivity and wellbeing. Who doesn't want happy employees doing great things?

A coaching and mentoring culture should be instilled to cultivate stronger relationships between leaders (with high EQ) and staff (that may be lacking in this area). This has been incorporated into many organisations, but fairly inconsistently. It's assumed that a person in a management position has a high EQ. We all know that this is not always the case, and most times having these individuals coach/mentor others proves disastrous. As we're facing economic upheaval, those that handle change well will thrive. These are the people you want to "lead without a title". They're mindful, authentic and aware of their flaws and strengths. I've watched many companies get this right, by placing individuals who reflect the values they desire to propagate as unofficial coaches and mentors to younger colleagues in the organisation.

## **1. EQ must be an integrated force**

Developing EQ can't be done in training alone, a strong company culture that centres around ideals such as fairness and compassion are also critical. Humans have a need to belong, so if the culture is positive, open and welcoming, expect the people to follow suit. HR's role is usually to hone company culture, therefore it makes sense that they develop strategies to promote company culture consistently.

Consistency is the name of the game when growing emotional intelligence. Every email, conversation, text or quick chat is an opportunity to show people that in the face of adversity, we are strong! It's the toughest people that handle this most delicate subject.

Wellness is a subject that is often glossed over, but when you consider that 75% of absenteeism occurs due to work-related stress it stands to reason that helping employees feel better about work is core to your company's productivity. Neuroscience says that the brain does not distinguish between a perceived or real threat, meaning that it'll react to a hijacking or the possibility of being retrenched

the same. Given that over the past few years restructuring and job safety is a consistent coffee chat, we're now in an almost constant state of threat. This lowers our creativity, empathy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills in all key areas of EQ and productivity, not just in the workplace. Staff should be able to have transparent and honest conversations with their managers and that managers are given the tools to communicate these messages of care and compassion.

If an organisation is in a state of transition, how are conversations with staff empowering them for their change? How can leaders create positive conversations about remaining adaptable for their staff and themselves? No matter how many robots we use, people are the heart of every business and it's essential that HR takes its rightful place in guiding this.

We've identified **10 essential human skills - creative thinking, critical thinking, persuasion, social intelligence, negotiation, mindfulness, leadership, empathy, conflict resolution, adaptability** - that we weave into all of our courses and programmes, to ensure that individuals are future-proofed and have what they need to succeed both now and with whatever is to come.



### About the author:

Ashalia Maharajh is our Corporate Training Manager in Johannesburg. She has studied Psychology, is experienced in HR and specialised in Education from entry to Executive levels. Her greatest passion lies within Learning and Development and Neuroscience.

She is the mom of two girls and often puts her socks on inside out.

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