

The Role of Emotional and Social Intelligence in Your Career

Several years ago, Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *The Tipping Point*, penned a second wildly popular book entitled, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. To be frank, I purchased this book several months before I actually read it - picking it up and putting it down repeatedly until, one day, it literally dawned on me that *now* seemed the right moment to read *Blink*. I don't quite know what I was waiting for or whether I was just uninspired. I simply knew that until that fateful day arrived, I simply was not in the right frame of mind to sit down and digest its contents and, thereafter, put its lessons to good use.

Fortunately, that day is long gone. For those readers who have not enjoyed *Blink*, it is a narrative about how we think without thinking. It is a book about choices we make in an instant, why we make those choices, and it pulls together research from psychology, behavioral economics and studies on the adaptive unconscious. In my own world, I've come to define *Blink* in a much more bottom-line fashion. Right or wrong, *Blink* has been crystallized for me into seven instructive words, namely: "my three second read on a situation." For me, this means that for every decision I make, and for every reaction I have to a person, place, thing, client, job, or otherwise, I now realize that I make *two* decisions - one based on the rapid impression I get in the first three seconds of an interaction (in a blink) and one based on a later impression when logic and other impulses creep into my decision-making process. Both sides of that whole are equally important.

Without getting into the deeper mechanics of *Blink*, I can tell you that the concepts within this book moved me forward into the study of Emotional Intelligence and its counterpart Social Intelligence¹, and this is where your story begins:

The Law Firm Model: Exchanging Traditional for the Corporate Business Model

Why venture into the psychological scriptures of Emotional and Social Intelligence? Because in the world of career counseling where life-changing decisions are made by candidates every day and business-directed decisions are made by law firms every day, there is something to be said for understanding why people do the things they do, why they are drawn to certain choices and repulsed by other choices, why hiring partners choose one candidate over another, and whether any of this can be predicted or managed toward a more predictable outcome leading to even stronger relationships.

That's the first reason. The second reason we need to venture down this road is the economy's affect on hiring in 2009, 2010, etc. As law firms become more fiscally conservative and intent on saving costs, they are seeking to eliminate risk from their hiring protocol and make better hiring decisions. With law firms moving away from the traditional law firm business model and toward a more corporate business model, firms are likewise instituting hiring schemes which are more corporate in nature and include, but are not limited to, personality tests, unpaid or hourly paid trial periods, and [impromptu oral tests setting forth complicated legal scenarios and requiring a 10-minute verbal solution in the interview setting \(not unlike the essay portion of traditional state-wide Bar Exams. . .but oral instead of written\)](#). For the first time, this year, I have seen all of the above in the law firm interview setting, and I expect to see more of this type of testing as law firms focus on the bottom line ever more closely and try to take more of their cues from the business world.

For my partner candidates, I expect to likewise see a more sophisticated evaluation of personality conflicts designed to eliminate risky problem partners and divisive ego-driven partners. Again, for the first time this year, I've seen partners (regardless of the value of their portable books) get turned away from law firms where the firm felt the candidate might be a problem because of (i) their "cowboy reputation" in the market; (ii) a past malpractice allegation; or (iii) a noticeable undercurrent of disregard for those who work beneath them. This type of personality review is unprecedented, and it highlights for me the need for my partner candidates to have a better understanding of how hiring decisions are being made in the shadow of a tough

economy...and have a better understanding of how they, as individuals, are being perceived in the interview setting by employers with whom they come face-to-face.

In short, as law firms move away from the traditional business model toward a more corporate business model, things that never mattered before (like personality and emotional connectedness) are gaining value. Thus, while academics/firm experience (for associates) and portables (for partners) remain the key instruments of value, a candidate's ability to relate, understand, work with, and serve your clients/peers, is moving rapidly toward the front of the line as well. Law firms are looking to eliminate risk from their hiring decisions (they are no longer just focused on hiring a "warm body" as some people like to say). One way of eliminating risk is making sure that not only does one possess the academics and experience required for the job (as well as profitability margins for partners) but also making sure that a new hire is emotionally and socially intelligent.

Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence - A Brief Synopsis

To provide a brief synopsis for those who have not ventured down this road, Emotional Intelligence ("EI") is often described as the ability to identify, assess and manage the emotions of one's self and others.² This subject area gained notoriety with the publication of Daniel Goleman's best seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* which discusses leadership performance as a four-part construct: (i) self-awareness (knowing your own emotions and recognizing their impact); (ii) self management (controlling your own emotions and adapting to circumstances); (iii) social awareness (sensing and reacting to others' emotions while understanding social networks); and (iv) relationship management (inspiring, influencing and developing others while management conflicts).³ The underlying message for attorneys looking at EI is that (simply put) it's not enough to be merely facts/figures intelligent; you also need to be socially/emotionally intelligence to succeed and rise above. Those individuals who possess both sides of that coin redefine what it means to be smart.

From EI, (which largely focuses on our ability to manage our own emotions and our ability to have positive relationships - and is very often used in the corporate sector by management theorists to teach proper management techniques) stems Social Intelligence (which extends the picture beyond one-person into the two-person world and what transpires as we connect).⁴ In its simplest form, Social Intelligence ("SI") is the ability to understand others and rests as the intelligence which lies behind group interactions and behaviors - the interpersonal world.⁵ We are all, individually, gifted in this area to varying degrees, and our ability to navigate these interpersonal waters - particularly in the career sector - can have a very real effect on our ability to achieve our long-term goals and, in today's economic climate, achieve hiring success.

As one might guess, SI plays a key role at the very beginning of any job process - the interview and the networking game. It is at this stage that our minds are busy assessing and gathering data about the people we meet, and they are busy gathering data about us. Thus, like *Blink*, we are getting a three second read on someone, and there is a biological catalyst for that event. Without getting into the various parts of the brain profile, this three second read occurs because of the way our brains are physically built. It's the way our brains work.⁶ Our minds are, in fact, gathering data on the brief emotional expressions that flit across people's faces during meet and greet scenarios, and we should be cognizant of this occurrence within ourselves and within others.

From this cursory beginning progresses our ability to get along with others, our ability to win someone's approval, our ability to win someone's support, and our ability to literally fail or win at networking scenarios. Quite simply, SI has been termed "social radar," and in today's economy, social radar is a skill which cannot be undervalued as firm's and employers begin hiring with an eye toward finding candidates who are more

than just worker bees and, more so, have the ability to be long-term assets to the corporation and risk-proof employees.

Social Intelligence in the Interview Sector

Knowing that EI and SI have become a bedrock for management and hiring in Corporate America, it is imperative that we also look at these areas for guidance in the law firm hiring sector. For me, reading Goleman's *Social Intelligence* provided a number of key guideposts which my attorney candidates could put to immediate use:

(i) Be aware of technology's potential role in stripping away your ability to interview effectively: While technology at our jobs and at home has the ability to connect us on the one hand, it also has the ability to distance us on the other and cripple our ability toward achieving a real "face-to-face connection" with others.⁷ In fact some believe that society's preoccupation with television, technology and other stand-alone, solitary pursuits can inevitably lead to a fraying of the social fabric and a decline in social capital.⁸ Thus, while people may feel more connected over the internet wires, they may likewise find themselves wholly unprepared for face-to-face connection in the interview setting and/or may find that their interpersonal skills are not as sharp as they once were. Interconnectedness is a learned skill. As a result, we should be mindful of the fact that if we spend a great deal of time disconnected from interpersonal contact, other than via the internet, our sharpness in this area may be dulled. Signs of such disconnection can often be exhibited as nervousness in social settings or an inability to "come up with things to say" during networking events or "ways to bond" during team-minded activities. If you, yourself, feel stress creeping in during such interpersonal periods, be mindful of this and don't ignore it. You may do well to meet with a coach prior to an interview. You may also do well to videotape yourself during a mock interview setting so that you can see how you are coming across to an audience. In the past, not "connecting" during an interview often didn't matter as long as the resume was strong. Such is no longer the case.

(ii) Are your *unspoken* emotions betraying the things you actually say in an interview? As stated in SI, before one learns verbal communication, most of us learn how to circle each other emotionally. Thus, "feelings . . . remain the bedrock of communication in adulthood. This silent dialogue on feelings is the substrate on which all other encounters build and the hidden agenda in every interaction."⁹ In light of the above, you should know that preparing for an interview includes more than just running through the top ten questions which may be posed to you by the interviewer so that what you say is on point. In addition to the above, you should consider your own background *feelings* at the time of the interview- is their panic, fear, anger? Were you recently laid off and still find yourself reeling from that experience? Did you recently go from equity to non-equity and still find yourself troubled by that reality? If so, be aware of these emotions and take the time you need to deal with them or neutralize them before going into an interview or networking event. While you may not be aware of the fact that your body language is leaking such emotions, they may in fact be obvious to those around you, serving as a shadow figure to your own physical form.

What's the point in trying to neutralize bad emotions or unrestful feelings before walking into an interview? Well, SI supports the fact that emotions are contagious from interviewee to interviewer and are very often felt or read from a person's facial expressions, eyes, or other body language -regardless of what the person is verbally saying. Hence, no matter how poised and clear you are verbally in response to an interview question, if something about your manner seems "off," you may leave your interviewer with the wrong impression. In other words, if you exit an interview, and your interviewer finds himself/herself suddenly stressed, tired, or disgruntled, themselves, chances are they are not going to write you a positive review. Chances are - you did not get that job. So, remember: An interview includes what you say and what you do not say. Be certain you have adequately prepared for both sides of that whole.

(iii) Is getting the job your primary goal - OR - is establishing a relationship with your interviewer your primary goal? How attuned are you? As neuroscience develops, scientists are going from studying just one brain at a time to two brains at a time, at once, revealing a "neural duet between brains as people interact."¹⁰ This is an important revelation as the interaction between people is proving to be tangible, measurable and powerful! Knowing this, try to be aware of your communication style and whether you are attuned, first, and having the affect you wish to have on a listener, second. "During moments of genuine connection, what we say will be responsive to what the other feels, says and does. When we are poorly connected, our communications become verbal bullets: our message does not change to fit the other person's state but simply reflects our own. . . . Talking at a person rather than listening to him reduces a conversation to a monologue."¹¹ Whether you are attuned to someone is often determined by looking at your communication style - and what Daniel Goleman views either an (i) I-It communication style or (ii) an I-You style. I-You = wanting to enter and understand another person's inner reality."¹² It's an empathic connection. I-It = emotional indifference and remoteness.

Bottom Line: The "I-It style treats people as a means to an end, where the I-You mode dictates that the *relationship* becomes an end in itself."¹³ Be honest with yourself and determine which style you embrace. If attunement and relationship are your primary goals, you will be fine. If getting your message across has been your primary goal in the interview setting, rethink your approach.

(iv) Be aware that our social interactions - and the choices we make in our lives - are governed by two unseen forces.

SI posits that our social world is consistently governed by two driving forces - a low road and a high road. As stated by Daniel Goleman:

"The 'low road' is circuitry that operates beneath our awareness, automatically and effortlessly, with immense speed. Most of what we do seems to be piloted by massive neural networks operating via the low road - particularly our emotional life. When we are captivated by an attractive face, or sense the sarcasm in a remark, we have the low road to thank."¹⁴ The 'high road,' in contrast, runs through neural systems that work more methodically and step by step, with deliberate effort. We are aware of the high road, and it gives us at least some control over our inner life, which the low road denies us. When we ponder ways to approach that attractive person, or search for an artful riposte to sarcasm, we take the high road. The low road can be seen as 'wet,' dripping with emotion, and the high road as relatively 'dry,' 'coolly rational.' The low road traffics in raw feelings, the high in a considered understanding of what is going on. The low road lets us immediately feel with someone else; the high road can think about what we feel. Ordinarily, they mesh seamlessly. Our social lives are governed by these two modes."¹⁵

The position referenced by Goleman above is actually supported by biological factors - with different parts of the brain supporting the two different roads, and the implications of such statement are fascinating. Possessing an awareness of these two forces within one's self, and such forces' impact upon your own interpersonal relations, gives one an extraordinary power. Recognizing these forces and how they interplay can give you a much more clear ability to truly see an interpersonal connection, assess it, understand it, control it, and have it result in a relationship that is beneficial to you and your career. Understanding what factors/emotions sit behind the choices we make has huge implications for our abilities to succeed going forward. It becomes less about random relationships - some working and some not - and more about an awareness of relationships - the whys and why nots.

In fact, when reading Goleman's statement above, I was reminded of a friend of mine and his relationship with the game of chess. For years, this friend was a very good chess player. Sometimes winning, sometimes losing, he always enjoyed the game for what it was. However, intent upon understanding the sport a bit more deeply, he set off on a course of instruction which provided him not only with the tactical aspects of chess, but

also its history, origins, birth, post-war aspects, and other forces which have shaped the game. Returning to the game now, his ability to win most games is phenomenal. He now sees the interpersonal dance of chess in a very different light, fully aware of the forces at play, and the layering of choreography behind delivering "check mate."

We all should be so lucky. As the world of interviewing and hiring in today's legal world becomes more risk-adverse, our ability to understand the forces at play is crucial. We cannot control others, but we can control ourselves. To that end, Emotional and, more so, Social Intelligence plays a key role in our understanding of relationships and our resultant success in the hiring world. As we begin 2010, let's look upon this year with a strategic eye and pick up the tools we need to craft the type of future we envision for ourselves.

Author's note: Both Emotional and Social Intelligence are concepts with a multitude of authors, building on one another's findings. Both areas involve highly complicated discussions of brain structure, biological results, and emotional constructs and, as such, are more deeply involved than the cursory information provided in this article. However, due to the value of such concepts within the world of legal recruitment and hiring, I felt it important to perhaps pique the interest of our candidate readers and urge them to look more deeply into these studied areas. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. To the extent these concepts are relevant to Corporate America, they need to be relevant to you as law firms move closer and closer to mirroring corporate dynamics.

References:

Both Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence have been spoken, and written, about by numerous sources. My introduction to these concepts, however, was through Daniel Goleman's books: *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Dell, a division of Random House, Inc., 1995) and *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Dell, a division of Random House, Inc., 2006).

As quoted from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org/Emotional_intelligence).
Id.

Social Intelligence, The New Science of Human Relationships, by Daniel Goleman, pg. 5 (Bantam Dell, a division of Random House, Inc., 2006).

As quoted from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org/Social_intelligence) referencing *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Success*, by Karl Albrecht (2005). SI has been defined as (i) situational awareness; (ii) presence; (iii) authenticity; (iv) clarity and (v) empathy. In his most recent book, Daniel Goleman added social awareness and social facility to these constructs.

Social Intelligence, The New Science of Human Relationships, by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Dell, a division of Random House, Inc., 2006). Daniel Goleman alleges that we are designed for interconnectivity, constantly engaged in a "neural ballet" which connects us brain to brain with those around us. He further posits that our reactions to others, and theirs to us, have a far-reaching biological impact, sending out hormones that regulate everything from our hearts to our immunity, making good relationships act as nourishing agents and bad relationships act as toxins. Id.

Id. at pgs. 6-12.

Id. at pg. 7, quoting *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Id. at pg. 36.

Id. at pg. 28.

Id. at pg. 86.

Id. at pg. 106.

Id. at pg. 107.

Id. at pg. 16.

Id. at pgs. 16-17 (and footnote 9 therein at pg. 339).