



## **Strategies: Business schools eye their applicants' level of 'emotional intelligence'**

**Denver Business Journal by Colleen Stanley**

Date: May 20, 2013

What do Notre Dame, Yale, Dartmouth and the MIT Sloan School of Management business schools have in common, besides teaching sound business practices?

They're beginning to harness the power of emotional intelligence (also known as EQ) as they screen applicants. Measuring EQ is the latest attempt by business schools to identify the stars of the future. IQ is important for success in business and in life. But research indicates that soft skills are equally important. (Have you ever met the smartest guy in the room — and didn't want to have anything to do with him?)

Progressive sales organizations are taking a page out of the top business schools' playbook and testing for EQ skills in order to identify their future sales stars. They recognize that reading, relating and understanding customers is as important to closing business as industry knowledge and selling skills.

Here are four EQ skills to consider and interview for in your next hire.

- **Assertiveness.** This is the ability to state what you need nicely, without become aggressive.

Assertive salespeople are better at executing critical steps of the sales process, such as getting a prospect's budget before writing a proposal. Prospects often say, "I am not sure of my budget — just put something together."

The non-assertive salespeople goes along to get along and politely follows the prospect's directions. He spends hours putting together a proposal, only to hear the prospect say, "Hmmm ... this is more than I anticipated. Let me think it over." Chalk up another practice proposal.

The assertive salesperson knows there's a budget somewhere. Because if there wasn't some kind of budget, a prospect wouldn't be able to state that the price is too high. Assertive salespeople state what they need to create a win-win selling scenario.

- **Empathy,** which is the ability to understand what others are thinking or feeling. Empathetic salespeople are good at stepping into their prospect's shoes, and understanding their point of view and perspective.

Empathy is a gathering skill, so empathetic salespeople are inclined to ask more questions rather than move to a product dump, when salespeople spew details about the features and benefits of the product. They're fully present during a sales meeting and notice subtleties in their

prospects, such as a shift in body language or a change in tonality. As a result, they adapt and change their questions and approach during a sales meeting.

Non-empathetic salespeople tend to be focused on their agenda, not the prospect's. Because they're focused on themselves, not others, they have a hard time reading and relating to their prospects. Many a sale has been lost during the first 15 minutes of a meeting because prospects know when they're being heard and understood. They also know when a salesperson is on autopilot, reciting questions and sharing canned solutions.

- They can tolerate stress. Sales can be stressful. You have weeks where you hear “no” more often than “yes.” There's always a quota hanging over your head. And today's prospects are smarter and more educated because of the Internet.

Salespeople who aren't good at managing stress lose days of production when faced with a setback. They are slow to get back in the sales saddle.

[Scott Halford](#), president of Denver's Complete Intelligence LLC, works extensively with executives, teaching them emotional intelligence skills. He shares additional insights about those who don't handle stress well.

“Neuroscience is pointing to the downside of not managing stress: short tempers, unfocused mind, sleep disturbance. All of this affects the memory and can even lead to memory erasure. Imagine a high-flying salesperson with all that going on — not so high-flying anymore.”

- Self-regard is the ability to recognize your strengths and weaknesses. It's being confident without being arrogant.

Lack of self-regard often is the root cause for not contacting prospects in the C-suite. Sales managers often misdiagnose this performance issue and focus on improving their team's hard selling skills. Sales training sessions are held with the focus on how to identify and contact key buying influences within an organization. All good stuff — except that the manager might be working on the wrong end of the problem.

The salesperson knows what to do. The real problem is she lacks confidence in calling on people with big titles and big offices. She spends more time worrying about what could happen during a sales call than taking steps to make an appointment.

As a result, she stays in her comfort zone and schedules meetings with non-decision makers, though the check is signed two floors up. She's busy, but not productive.

Study top business schools that are integrating IQ and EQ in their selection process of students. Follow their lead and screen for both soft skills and hard selling skills. It's a winning combination and your competitive advantage.

Good Selling!

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