

Using Emotional Intelligence to Improve Officer Well Being

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to explain why emotional intelligence is important to the law enforcement profession. A measure of emotional intelligence, the EQ-i, was used to analyze and compare law enforcement officer behaviors. The EQ-i instrument provides fifteen sub-scales that were used to determine what officer behaviors would look like if officers were either high or low in these fifteen emotional intelligence competencies. The study suggests the need for law enforcement executives to model and provide coaching/mentoring in order to support their subordinates development of essential emotional intelligence competencies. By developing emotional intelligence competencies officers will be offered a better opportunity for “well being”. The present research demonstrates the need for law enforcement officers to demonstrate essential emotional intelligence competencies to allow them to become the very best public servants possible in a dangerous, difficult and stressful occupation. A standard of emotional intelligence will hopefully be established, which could be used as a benchmark to be considered in the identification, selection and development of future law enforcement officers. [International Journal of Emergency Mental Health, 2009, 11(2), pp. xxx-xxx].*

Key words: *Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Functioning, Social Intelligence, Law Enforcement, Leadership, Assessment, Well Being*

The public image of law enforcement is as diverse and complex as the people served by the profession. Due to the nature, visibility, and impact of law enforcement services upon society, this occupation is highly scrutinized regarding its tough demands on personnel and leadership to meet increasing public expectations. Crime statistics stress the necessity and importance for every law enforcement organization to learn how to recognize and cultivate their resources (Gaston, 1997). Furthermore, in an effort to counter crime while ensuring safe and healthy communities, law enforcement officers must contend with diverse populations who are willing to challenge authority and decisions. As a result

of this complex and dynamic landscape, the modern law enforcement officer needs more than tactical expertise and old autocratic styles in order to succeed (Brown, 1996).

George (2000) proposes that because of the rapid and ever-changing societal landscape, law enforcement officers require more than just task competencies or technical know-how. Officers possessing a particular blend of skills, competencies, and traits are more likely to be successful. According to Fishler (1997), law enforcement officers need to develop healthy relationships and manage conflict while achieving productive goals. To achieve their goals, law enforcement officers need skills to build, maintain, and strengthen alliances and partnerships, both within and outside an organization. Similarly, in his review of law enforcement officers within the LAPD, Reese (2005; cited in Jenks, 2007) described effective law enforcement officers as maintaining the respect

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and support of their peers and supervisors, as well as that of the community.

The Need for Emotional Intelligence in Law Enforcement Leadership

According to O'Neill and Cushing (1991), law enforcement faces daily challenges and stress that few other occupations undergo. "Few occupations require the intensity of constant alertness, proper mood and demeanor, short term memory, and physiological stamina that police work requires" (p. 56). To be an effective and efficient law enforcement officer in today's environment requires emotional intelligence and control to meet the demands faced on the streets. Today's law enforcement officer needs to be highly motivated with well developed communication skills able to engage leadership, other officers, and community members by managing relationships and emotionally connecting in order to balance the needs of the organization and community (Krimmel & Lindemuth, 2001).

Goldfarb and Aumiller (2008), psychologists' with a counseling center for Long Island police officers, coined the term "The Heavy Badge Syndrome" to describe the internal and external pressures and stresses uniquely associated with being a law enforcement officer. Gilmartin (2002) discusses the importance of work-life balance and the consistent emotional rollercoaster ride that is associated with the life and work of a law enforcement officer. The goal was to help law enforcement officers address the ever-present and constant internal assaults that an officer has to deal with on a career-long basis. Hackett and Violanti (2003) point out that the major contributors to law enforcement suicide are: psychological difficulties, alcohol abuse, relationships, stress, and trauma. The issue of law enforcement suicide has been highlighted by articles in national newspapers (e.g. USA Today, 2008), often quoting the statistic that police have a suicide rate of 18 per 100,000 compared to the U.S. population of 11.1 to 100,000. The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (2008) cites the number of deaths in law enforcement for the year 2007 at 181 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty (a 20% increase from 2006), 73 feloniously killed, and 108 killed in job related accidents. The National P.O.L.I.C.E. Suicide Foundation website (2008) states that, over a three year period, law enforcement averaged 450 law enforcement suicides per year, meaning a suicide occurs approximately every 19 hours and 45 minutes in the U.S. They state that, "the numbers of deaths due to suicide are 2 to 3 times the

number of line of duty deaths among law enforcement agencies." The current practice of law enforcement organizations is to qualify one to four times a year to maintain proficiency and abide by state laws, yet a law enforcement officer is 2 to 3 times more likely to be killed by his own weapon rather than an adversary. The current law enforcement practice is to help protect officers from others but the data and statistics are clear that agencies often fail to train officers to adequately take care of themselves. Towards this effort, training in emotional intelligence competency may be a good start as part of a proactive approach to officer safety and wellbeing.

Emotional Intelligence

Charles Swindoll, the founder of Insight for Living, states that "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it" (Swindoll, 2008). This summarizes the essence of emotional intelligence. Every law enforcement officer is aware of the street-wise con; most children are aware of their mother's instinct; and everyone is aware of the need for common sense to keep out of trouble. The aforementioned examples are evidence of emotional intelligence at work in the real world. The choices we make, the way we think and act, are stimulated and impacted by our emotions and feelings (Fielder and Garcia, 1987; Forgas, 1992). The early writings of Thorndike (1920) first captured the essence of emotional intelligence, by describing people who had "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls...to act wisely in human relations", as having a different type of intelligence. (p.228). Leeper (1948) posited that "emotional thought" contributed to intelligence in general and was a part of "logical thought."

Gardner (1983) broadened the understanding of intelligence through his theory of "multiple intelligences" by establishing specific criteria for distinguishing behavior that would constitute intelligence. Gardner (1999) describes several forms of intelligence, two of which help establish the groundwork for evaluating emotional intelligence: 1) interpersonal – understanding of people and relationships; and 2) intrapersonal – understanding of oneself and one's emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) identified emotional intelligence for the first time as the "ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (p. 189).

In his work measuring a person's well being, Bar-On (1988) used the term emotional quotient to quantify the level

of one's emotional functioning. Bar-On (2002) defines emotional intelligence in terms of a person's ability to contend with their surroundings by using an assortment of social and emotional skills and abilities, which he divides into five composite scales and 15 subscales. Goleman (2000) defines emotional intelligence as "a learned capability...that results in outstanding performance at work" (p. 27).

Research has highlighted the utility of emotional intelligence. This literature suggests that promoting the development of emotional intelligence competencies through the use of assessment instruments can help improve self-awareness because it enables respondents to recognize their own emotions and the emotions of others (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Sosik & Megerian, 1999; Weisinger, 1998). Therefore, the use of an emotional intelligence instrument to assess competencies holds the possibility for improving the performance of law enforcement officers (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2002; Stein & Book, 2001).

Emotional Intelligence Competencies and Law Enforcement Officers

To determine what emotional intelligence looks like in the law enforcement culture, a review of the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I), designed by Bar-On (2002), will be reviewed. EQ-I provides a quantitative assessment of emotional intelligence. To facilitate a conceptual and practical understanding of the EQ-I, an overview of the 5-Composite scales and their respective subscales is necessary. The five composite are comprised of emotional competencies that have been grouped together based on both logical homogeneous and statistical clustering. The scales include:

- 1) *Intrapersonal*, which includes the subscales of emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, and independence.
- 2) *Interpersonal*, which includes the subscales of empathy, interpersonal relationship, and social responsibility.
- 3) *Adaptability*, which includes the subscales of problem solving, reality testing, and flexibility.
- 4) *Stress Management*, which includes the subscales of stress tolerance, and impulse control.
- 5) *General Mood*, which includes the subscales of happiness and optimism.

So what would a law enforcement officer with low or high emotional intelligence look like? If law enforcement officers have low self-regard they would be unsure of themselves, lack self-respect and self-esteem, and would not garner the respect necessary to be an effective officer. Additionally, low self-regard may be displayed by a lack of confidence and poor physical appearance, all of which are trouble indicators that most training officers regularly look for. The goal of establishing high self-regard in a law enforcement environment would be to increase self-assurance, self-esteem and confidence, which should be one of the primary aims of every law enforcement academy. The implementation of the EQ-I provides a quantifiable index of one's self-regard permitting a benchmark for which development and change can be monitored. Acceptance of oneself and the development of inner strength will be the result of increasing self-regard, as well as producing fulfillment with self and the law enforcement profession.

Emotional Intelligence in Law Enforcement Officers: Training and Performance

Implications

Based on the above analysis, a number of emotional intelligence competencies can be of importance to successfully carrying-out the law enforcement role, as well as to the healthy integration of that role into one's overall lifestyle and personal wellbeing.

Emotional self-awareness. A law enforcement officer with low emotional self-awareness may have a hard time acknowledging and verbalizing their own emotions and thus difficulty in recognizing how their emotions effect interpersonal interactions, decision-making, and overall functioning. Low self-awareness can cause an officer to avoid emotional ownership and create a tendency towards externalization, preventing officers from asking for support when needed most. Likewise, low emotional self-awareness may result in inaccurate projection of emotions and the misinterpretation of others' emotions. In either case, critical judgment and decision-making may be compromised.

Gilmartin (2002) explains that lawenforcement personnel go through psychological changes as they progress in their careers, which he describes as hypervigilance. This transformation is caused by the constant exposure to negativity, violence, and tragic events and leads to a biological rollercoaster. The ride consists of the emotionally high on-duty officer and the tired and apathetic emotionally low off-

duty officer. “Any situation that reduces the individual’s degree of control in his or her own life can precipitate a sense of psychological distress. If the loss of control is combined with high demands the individual must handle, the degree of psychological imbalance or stress can be extremely high...As predictability, autonomy, and control of the sense of self decrease in a person’s life, a sense of emotional vulnerability, susceptibility, and risk increase. As police officers decrease the number of dimensions or roles defining their sense of self and become increasingly invested in only the police role, they increase their level of vulnerability” (Gilmartin, 2002, p. 78).

According to Stein and Book, “The goal of emotional self-awareness isn’t to analyze our emotions to death, to unduly suppress them or to do away with them altogether...But we must strive to be conscious of what we feel and why we feel the way we do, so that we aren’t driven blindly by internal forces or pushed into self-defeating behavior by default, for want of the requisite information. Being emotionally self-aware also has a preventative benefit” (Stein & Book 2001, p.60).

Too often officers with low emotional self-awareness take themselves too seriously and add self-induced stress. In the worst case scenario, low emotional self-awareness can cause denial of personal feelings and thereby jeopardize wellbeing. This is probably the single most important emotional intelligence competency deficit that contributes to the high suicide and divorce rates in law enforcement [Au: ref]. This situation could cause an officer to verbally or physically overreact, resulting in embarrassment to themselves and the department. Officers with high emotional self-awareness are able to relate their own feelings to appropriate causes thereby establishing good self-awareness. These officers are able to differentiate between emotions, are able to understand how and why emotions change, are able to blend emotions appropriately. Officers with high emotional self-awareness have an understanding of how and why others affect them, and are able to express these emotions and feelings in a positive way. They know what they are feeling and why, and they can read other people as well as permitting others to clearly read them when they wish to. Officers with high emotional self-awareness are able to prevent simple incidents from growing out of proportion, and are able to bring calm to a chaotic situation. Law enforcement officers strong in emotional self-awareness are able to withstand and adequately deal with what Gilmartin (2002) refers to as emotional survival.

Assertiveness. Most law enforcement personnel are taught to understand the importance of assertiveness and the significance of taking charge in critical situations. Strength in assertiveness includes the ability of officers to express themselves easily, yet retain the ability to defend themselves, protect citizens, stand their ground, and enforce justice in a forthright but non-abusive manner. Maintaining a properly assertive attitude enables the officer to navigate between the two extremes of aggressiveness, which can lead to abuse of force and citizen hostility, and passivity, which can make the officer an easy target for exploitation or attack.

Independent decision-making. Another competency taught to most law enforcement recruits is the need for independence in making decisions. Due to shortages of manpower and the large areas covered by most patrols, time and distance required for backup is always cause for concern. High independence provides officers the ability to be self-directed and self-controlled in thought and action, while remaining free of emotional dependency. Additionally high independence produces self-reliance in planning and decision-making, but allows the officer the ability to consult with others. The inner strength and confidence gained from independent decision making affords the officer the ability to function autonomously rather than overly depending on the security or support of others. In developmental terms, this officer would be called able and willing. The greatest concern with a lack of independence in a law enforcement officer is lack of self-confidence and allowing others to make final decisions, resulting in the abdication of the primary duty of a law enforcement officer, which is bringing calm to a crisis.

Self-actualization. Heading 4 Important to a successful career in law enforcement is self-actualization, which is the ability to realize one’s potential capabilities and establish a roadmap with a sense of purpose. It is important to note that the main reason many individuals join law enforcement is not for the salaries and benefit packages but for the purpose and mission of protecting and serving the community. High self-actualization can result in a dynamic temperament of striving towards maximum development in which one tries to do his or her best, improve the self, and involve him- or herself in pursuits that lead to a rich and meaningful life. An officer’s failure to develop self-actualization can result in a lack of motivation or stagnation, creating uncertainty of where they are going in their profession and life’s journey. Without self-actualization an officer will have difficulty finding fulfillment and satisfaction in their work and will have trouble understanding life’s meaning for them.

Empathy. The emotional intelligence competency that can have the most impact and interaction within and without the profession is empathy. Empathy is the ability to be aware of, understand, and appreciate the feelings of others. Officers high in empathy have the ability to emotionally read other people and pick up on social cues, which allows them to care and show concern for others. This competency is important in enabling officers, husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, co-workers, and friends to make and build personal and emotional relationships. Officers lacking in empathy often fail to understand the feelings of others and have difficulties in relating to and with others, resulting in the misinterpretation of social cues and surprise reactions from others. Officers lacking empathy often forget who they are and where they came from.

Social responsibility. One cannot underestimate the importance of social responsibility to the law enforcement profession. It is social responsibility that is at the core of an officer's mission and purpose and provides guidance and direction with an internal compass. Social responsibility is what makes a law enforcement officer a cooperative, contributing, and constructive member of the profession. This competency allows officers to act responsibly within and outside the profession, having a social consciousness and a concern for others. By upholding rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, officers demonstrate professionalism as well as high social responsibility. Additionally, high social responsibility allows officers to be accepting of others, enhancing their ability to do things for and with others. The inability to develop social responsibility is often at the source of an officers' questioning of their own commitment to the profession, organization, and group. A lack of social responsibility will prevent officers from willingly getting involved in group or team efforts, even to the point of keeping them from following through on group tasks. Selecting officers high in the emotional intelligence competency of social responsibility is the key to successful and effective community policing.

Interpersonal relationships. With many departments incorporating some form of community policing, the importance of developing emotional intelligence is extremely important. Officers highly skilled in interpersonal relationships have the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships and create positive outlook towards social exchange. Intimacy, giving and receiving affection, feeling at ease in social relations are some of the benefits of being high in interpersonal relationships. Failure of an officer to develop the competency of interpersonal relation-

ships will be demonstrated by a lack of intimacy, an ungiving and uncaring attitude, and an inability to share feelings or to develop and maintain relationships. This can ultimately lead to social isolation. Law enforcement is a team effort, and loners are counterproductive when creating vision and team building.

Stress tolerance. Important to law enforcement is the competency of stress tolerance and the officer's ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without falling apart. Officers high in stress tolerance have the capacity to choose the proper course of action for coping with stress and have an optimistic disposition towards overcoming problems. Of extreme importance to law enforcement officers high in stress tolerance is the belief that one can control and influence the situation. Officers low in stress tolerance often lack, or are ineffective in using, adaptive coping mechanisms. In addition, they are fearful, reactive rather than proactive, and have high levels of anxiety. When it comes to stress management and dealing with the public, an officer must remember that emotions are like germs, they are transmissible and contagious; therefore they need to ensure they are receiving and passing the intended ones.

Impulse control. With the media's attention to law enforcement's every step, impulse control, which is important to self-control and self-management, is an extremely important component of an officer's character and ethical behavior. The emotional competency of impulse control provides the officer with the ability to resist or delay an impulse, drive, or temptation to act or respond. Being composed and controlling aggression, hostility, and irresponsible behavior are the result of an officer having high impulse control. Problems in impulse control will be manifested by an officer having low frustration tolerance, impulsiveness, anger control problems, explosiveness, loss of self control, and unpredictable behavior. Additionally, officers lacking impulse control will often find themselves in tomorrow's headlines, as impulsiveness can lead to a lack of anger control, heightened aggressiveness, acting abusively, and the inappropriate use of force.

Reality testing. The competency of reality testing, which is the ability to assess the correspondence between what is experienced and what objectively exists, is essential to all law enforcement officers. Officers require the capacity to see things objectively as they are, rather than what they wish or fear. Officers must have the ability to concentrate and focus when trying to assess and cope with situations that arise on

a regular basis. Officers high in reality testing are able to search for objective evidence to confirm, justify, and support feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Officers low in reality testing are tuned out, disconnected, and are unrealistic in their evaluations and assumptions. An officer low in reality testing is a threat to him- or herself and those they are assigned to protect and serve.

Flexibility. Flexibility is the emotional intelligence competency that allows officers the ability to adjust their emotions, thoughts, and behavior to changing situations and conditions, and allows them to be open to and tolerant of new ideas. Additionally, officers high in flexibility are mentally agile, synergistic, and capable of reacting to change without rigidity. Necessary to success in law enforcement is the ability to change assumptions and actions when evidence suggests they are mistaken and the ability to adapt to unfamiliar, unpredictable, and dynamic circumstances. Failure to develop flexibility can create officers that are rigid, resistant to change, and stuck in current behavior patterns which are counterproductive to the ever changing dynamics of public service.

Problem-solving. Law enforcement officers are under constant pressure to resolve issues and problems quickly and effectively, therefore they need to have high problem solving competencies. Problem-solving competency provides the officer with the ability to identify and define problems while generating and implementing practical solutions. Officers high in problem solving identify and solve problems by using a systematic approach through first gathering information, and then weighing pros and cons prior to making decisions. Officers low in problem solving depend on assumptions and have a tendency to jump to solutions and conclusions, fly by the seat of their pants, and fail to use a structured strategy or process. Too often officers with low problem solving competency depend on short-term solutions to solve symptoms rather than looking at the big picture to solve the source of the concern.

Optimism. Important to officer emotional survival is the element of optimism and what Collins (2001) refers to as confronting the facts. Realistic optimism is the ability to look at the brighter side of life while maintaining a positive attitude even in face of adversity. Key to relating with others in the office and the community is keeping a hopeful approach to life and maintaining a positive approach to daily living. Officers with high optimism are able to create and sustain

positive change through concentrating on their circle of influence, as opposed to worrying about the concerns of the world. Pessimism, fear, and uncertainty are the results of low optimism and result in wasted time and energy with self-induced stress.

Happiness. The ability to feel satisfied with one's life, to enjoy oneself and others, and to have fun is the result of the happiness competency. Happiness is both the product and indicator of an officer's overall degree of emotional intelligence, and is associated with a general feeling of cheerfulness and enthusiasm. Officers low in happiness will be dissatisfied with their job, profession, and/or life, and will avoid the company of others. These officers will lack motivation and drive, and will have a negative attitude, leading them to withdraw from social contacts. The worst possible situation for a law enforcement officer is a disconnection from the public, their family, and their peer support group.

Discussion

Law enforcement officers are a unique and diverse group of people who experience a wide variety of emotions. Therefore, law enforcement officers face different and unusual challenges. Due to the nature, visibility, and important impact of law enforcement services upon society, the occupation is highly scrutinized regarding its tough demands to meet public expectations. Because of these demands and expectations, there is a need to know if emotional intelligence can be used for identifying competencies in law enforcement officers.

The research (Goleman, 1998; Goleman & Cherniss, 2001) seems clear that while technical skills are important, organizations also need to identify, select, promote, and develop people based on emotional intelligence competency. This article has begun the process of a systematic and focused approach to identifying how emotional intelligence effects performance in the field of law enforcement.

Knowledge of emotional intelligence competencies is important to law enforcement and public safety officers because research has demonstrated that management of one's emotions and behavior depends upon self-awareness and positive moods that tend to heighten perceptions and affect future success and self-efficacy (Forgas, Bower, Krantz, & Moylan, 1990; Kavanagh & Bower, 1985). Kelly & Barsade's (2001) research indicates that sharing of emotions enhances team building, and that people who model appropriate emo-

tions during times of ambiguity can increase group solidarity, which is extremely important to law enforcement where ambiguity is faced on a daily basis.

Law enforcement is a dynamic and professional culture, and divergence from the cultural norm is not always appreciated (Fishler, 1997; Hoffman & Collingwood, 1995). One of the purposes of this article is to represent a call for future research on the importance of emotional intelligence to the law enforcement profession. One specific avenue for future research could focus on the comparison of self-perceived emotional intelligence of law enforcement officers to the perception of others, utilizing a multi-rater measurement of emotional intelligence. Additional research could also examine the most effective means of teaching and reinforcing emotional intelligence within the law enforcement and public safety culture, especially among the leaders and policy-makers in this field. Longitudinal research investigating whether personal knowledge and understanding of one's emotional intelligence competencies leads to leadership development or changed behavior would also prove to be a fascinating avenue for future research.

To better serve and protect the public, law enforcement officers must learn to monitor their own and other's feelings and emotions and to use this knowledge to guide their thinking and action. Today's law enforcement officer needs to be able to motivate people, to communicate effectively with co-workers and community members by managing relationships and connecting emotionally in order to balance the needs of the law enforcement agency and the community (Krimmel and Lindemuth, 2001). The present article demonstrates the need for law enforcement officers to demonstrate essential emotional intelligence competencies to allow them to become the very best public servants possible.

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