



Responding With Emotional Intelligence When Your Values Are Violated

By Jean Greaves, Ph.D. and Rob Fullerton, M.S.

In TalentSmart's emotional intelligence (EQ) training programs, we often get questions about beliefs. People want to know whether a person's beliefs play a role in their EQ. Here's how to think about this important question.

We typically uphold beliefs as absolute truths, whether or not they can be proven. One employee may believe that "everyone should be treated equally," and another employee may believe that "everyone should be treated fairly." Their beliefs form the lenses through which they observe and make sense of what those around them say and do at work. We all perceive the people and situations around us based on our beliefs. Beliefs are the source of many emotions at work.

When Scott believes Ron doesn't work hard enough

Consider two co-workers with seemingly incompatible beliefs. Scott is a financial advisor who takes pride in hard work and frequently puts in long hours because he believes the amount of time he spends at the office reflects his dedication. He is married and has two children, who he is putting through college. His co-worker, Ron, also values being industrious but works a strict nine-to-five schedule, so he can assist coaching his son's baseball team, eat dinner with his family, read to his youngest daughter, etc. He manages his accounts well and is well liked by his clients. He is not the top-producing advisor in the office.

Around the time the branch was gearing up for its year-end performance review, it became apparent to everyone in the office that meeting this year's numbers would be quite a feat. The firm had set high expectations for this

year, and Scott and Ron's branch manager was adamant about reporting the highest numbers of any branch in her region. As he buckled down to make some lucrative trades before the year's end, Scott became silently incensed by Ron's "cavalier" attitude toward work. Here the office was banding together to outperform others, and Ron was not willing to stay even a minute after five! In Scott's mind, such times demanded staying late to do as much business as possible. Ron, on the other hand, found ways to work as efficiently as possible, so he could still fulfill his responsibilities at home. He began researching hot investments late at night after putting the kids to bed, so he could execute trades first thing in the morning. Scott had no idea Ron had been putting in these extra efforts.

Both of these hard working professionals have similar values (work and family), but each holds different beliefs about what hard work looks like and how to best provide for his family. Scott's beliefs about what it means to work hard caused him to pay attention only to when Ron left the office. This led him to question Ron's commitment to his job and stirred emotions in him, such as resentful and bitter feelings. The result being that Scott closed himself off to alternative explanations for Ron's behavior, presumed that their values didn't align, and began to avoid him around the office.

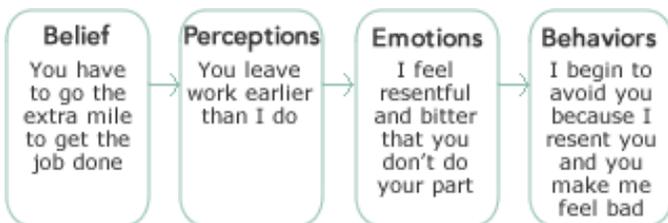
Our beliefs drive our feelings and behavior

When someone gets us all riled up, it might have more to do with our beliefs than with what the other person does. Had Scott recognized that feeling bitter wasn't productive (self-awareness) and that there is always more to every person's story (social awareness), he may have approached Ron to find out about what he was doing to

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contribute to the office goal. Had he done this, Ron would have learned that he had more in common with Ron than it first appeared.

Many of our assumptions and expectations stem from beliefs like Scott's. Rightly or wrongly, beliefs cloud our perceptions of the situations we are in and the people around us. The situation itself does not determine how we feel about it; it's the way we perceive the situation based on our beliefs.



As we perceive a situation through the lens of our beliefs, specific emotions arise, which, in turn, influence how we behave in given situation.

Use your EQ to spot outdated, unrealistic, or unproductive beliefs

If the particular way we are looking at a situation stirs difficult emotions, it may be helpful to trace our perceptions back to a fundamental belief we have in that situation. Here's what you can do to explore the role that your beliefs play in your emotional reactions. Practice *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Self-Awareness strategy #10: *Stop and Ask Yourself Why You Do the Things You Do*. If you begin to find yourself getting worked up over a situation with someone, it is helpful to take a good look at yourself first and foremost. As you become aware of the emotional reaction, consider it a signal from your body and mind that something is off. Such reactions often

signify that a belief that you hold has been violated. If the emotion is strong and causing you distress, reflect on the way you perceive what's happening and how it may be tied to a belief. If possible, jot down the belief in the form of a statement.

Uncover it

Example: Sometimes work requires everyone to go the extra mile to get the job done.

By making it concrete, at least you will understand why you feel the way you do about a situation. Now you may be able to consider alternative beliefs.

Rethink it

Example: Do I have to define "getting the job done" as hours at the office?

Sometimes you will decide to keep your belief and take specific actions based on them (e.g., *I'll ask my supervisor whether there is a policy around schedules and bring up the inconsistencies*). Other times you will realize that your belief is causing a rift in your working relationships within the team.

Adjust it

Example: Sometimes work requires us to put in extra hours, but some people can get more done without putting in extra hours at the office.

Beliefs that are ineffectual can be altered to accommodate changing work practices.

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Also use your EQ to handle incompatible beliefs

Of course, there will be times when a belief you hold dear is not shared at work. Your belief may be so fundamentally important to you that rethinking it or adjusting it is not an option. For example, you may believe there are no bad people, just people trying their best; whereas your cynical boss believes that people are lazy and take short cuts. In this challenging case, your choices are to address it, live with it, or leave.

Emotional intelligence skills will help you make your choice constructively. Addressing incompatible beliefs means making sure people understand what you believe, so they understand your actions, rather than pointing out what's wrong with the other person's beliefs. Living with it means letting go of the drive to change what the other person believes and accepting that it's ok not to see eye-to-eye on every issue. You might have to disengage emotionally and focus more heavily on the tasks at hand. When conflicting beliefs are integral to the work you do, the relationship with your boss, or the philosophy of your company, prolonged negative emotions may signal that the best thing for you to do is remove yourself from the situation and find a job, boss, or company that is compatible with what you believe.

The next time you notice strong negative feelings surfacing, use your EQ. Your self-awareness and social awareness skills will help you uncover your beliefs and sometimes rethink them. Then, use your self-management skills to adjust any belief that is outdated (all people have to work the same way), unrealistic (I have to be perfect), or unproductive (deadlines are optional). For those beliefs you choose to hold on to (I believe everyone wants to do their best), your awareness skills will help

you to recognize when a situation violates that belief, and your management skills will help you do something constructive about it. You will benefit, your relationships at work will benefit, and your organization will benefit. 

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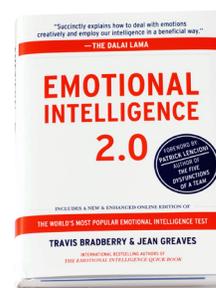
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