

How Emotional Intelligence Can Make Your Team More Agile

When thinking about team agility, it might help to picture a team of whitewater rafters heading toward class five rapids. The team paddles and maneuvers the raft swiftly but effectively. They're proactive in communicating logs or rocks they see in their path. They adapt in real time to new challenges by scanning the near horizon, gathering information, communicating, and calling out a clear strategy of action. They're decisive and intelligently improvisational in the face of stress and accelerated change. They have to be or they will capsize.

These agile traits make any team successful. In fact, research on agile teams shows greater productivity, increased employee satisfaction, and a stronger sense of trust and respect among the group. A Gallup study also found that employees who view their organizations as agile are more likely to believe in the future financial stability of their organization and more than twice as likely to believe in their leadership. So how does a team develop their agility? While there are essential elements of process and structure, many of the core traits that define agile teams hinge on emotional intelligence (EQ) at the team level. For example, it's with team EQ that an agile team is able to develop an environment of trust, manage their stress through change, and communicate openly and clearly to devise a plan.

To aid in your team's agility, TalentSmart recommends focusing on six emotionally intelligent team behaviors that agile teams rely on to succeed. Here are the first three.

1. They build an environment of trust. This is first on the list for a reason. Agility means finding quick, effective solutions, making decisions in the moment, performing well under pressure, and taking calculated risks. None of this is possible without an environment of trust, because people need to feel safe first. In a year-long study of Google's teams, Google found that the

single most important factor to their teams' success was not personality, IQ, or structure. It was a mentality called psychological safety. Psychological safety is a group mentality where people feel comfortable taking risks and don't fear rejection or ridicule. Google teams that felt this sense of safety had more equal contributions from all of their members, read their teammates' tones of voice and body language more effectively, and were more skilled at recognizing when a teammate felt excluded or upset. So how did the teams develop psychological safety? The answer was surprisingly simple and easy to implement: By setting aside time to share personal challenges or events with the group.

2. They communicate openly and fearlessly. Agile teams strip away barriers to innovation and improvement by empowering each member of their team to make decisions and test new ideas. With this great freedom of action, comes the great responsibility of communication. When significant changes are made, it's important that the rest of the team is cued in. Communicating your actions not only opens up potential for additional improvements or collaboration, but it also helps catch mistakes and prevent negative ripple effects.

3. They don't overvalue individuals. A study from MIT shows that a team's collective intelligence is actually much more likely to affect team performance than the sum of individual intelligences. And the good news is, collective intelligence is also much easier to improve. It's all about shifting the focus from individuals to the group dynamic and interactions (sounds a lot like EQ, doesn't it?). To improve collective intelligence, the researchers recommend you:

- Clarify the roles of individual members.

How Emotional Intelligence Can Make Your Team More Agile

- Teach conflict resolution.
- Recognize and reward team accomplishments over individual ones.
- Don't reward how busy people are. Instead, reward team outcomes, team happiness, and team engagement
- Ensure equal participation.

4. They manage their stress. In a study looking at the effects of stress on a team, researchers found some unsettling results. Stress has the power to entirely shift people's perspective from group-focused to self-focused. In other words, when a team finds itself under a lot of stress, individual members naturally begin to look out for themselves at the expense of the group's performance. Emotionally intelligent teams implement strategies for managing their stress as a group. They do things like hold one-on-one meetings to check in on stressed-out members, take turns sharing how they're feeling about a particularly high-stakes deadline, and emphasize individual self-care via breaks, exercise, and friendly conversations. All of these measures help keep the team on track through stressful periods. For an individual, this may even be the difference between negative emotions taking over and rising to the occasion to produce and adapt.

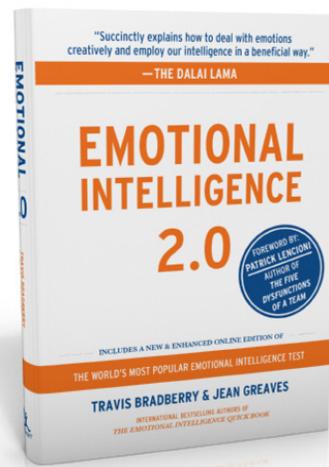
5. They may change course readily, but they operate from a stable center. People are quick to emphasize how agility is all about comfort with change and learning to live in a constant state of fluctuation. However, even on the fastest most innovative teams, stability plays an important role. In fact, the confidence to shift gears or experiment with new ideas that could easily fail typically comes from a stable center of values and norms. Emotionally intelligent teams establish their values and norms up front (and constantly

revisit them) in order to give everyone a common ground for actions and decisions. This comes in especially handy under ongoing pressure when our emotions are more likely to hijack how we make decisions to act.

6. They insist on accountability. Agility doesn't mean "do what I say, except more of it and faster." It doesn't mean "exist in a state of anarchy" either. Agility means empowering individuals to make decisions and test ideas by stripping away hinderances to their work. The key is that it's a two way street. In return for freedom, those individuals are expected see their own work through, own up to mistakes, be proactive about changes to come, and communicate openly with their teammates and manager.

Bringing It All Together

Emotional intelligence at the team level is the glue that holds agile teams together. Without team EQ, even agile teams might succumb to high levels of stress, communication breakdowns, an environment where some people dominate and others are afraid to speak, and a lost sense of stability or direction. With team EQ, agility will be bolstered and thrive. Add these team EQ goals to your team's repertoire to better navigate turbulent times.



FOR MORE INFORMATION,
VISIT WWW.TALENTSMART.COM
OR
CALL 888.818.SMART