

## Emotional Intelligence and the Law Enforcement Connection

What if you were waiting for a doctor's appointment and observed your doctor yelling and screaming at another patient. Would you be concerned? Of course you would. Shouldn't we have the same level of concern for law enforcement professionals who are tasked with performing one of the most difficult jobs in the world? Providing the police with the necessary physical and emotional tools to survive in a complex world is important. Having a high level of emotional intelligence can help officers survive, and even thrive, in the high stress environment in which they live.

### Emotional Intelligence and the Police

Let me give you an example. Have you ever been in an argument or heated discussion with someone and then later thought of something really clever to say? If you have, then you should consider yourself in good company. Many people who find themselves in a heated argument become so emotional about the topic their ability to think clearly goes out of the window. When our emotions are at their peak level, it can become difficult to stay focused on what is important. This is especially true for police officers who should know how to manage their emotions properly when dealing with stressful situations both on and off the job.

Having competent police officers who are emotionally stable is a trait the public and law enforcement administrators expect. It is not uncommon, however, to read about officer misconduct in the newspaper on any given day. Everything from officers committing criminal acts to lapses in moral judgment has been highly publicized in the media, giving the law enforcement profession a negative reputation. Police managers can learn a valuable lesson from law enforcement personnel whose negative actions had an emotional nexus.

For decades, the same battery of traditional tests has been provided to police candidates to determine if that particular applicant was suited for a job within the agency. Emotional intelligence is an area which may deserve more attention; however, to ensure agencies are hiring a well rounded candidate. Taking time to better understand the topic of emotional intelligence can provide police managers with the knowledge needed to not only screen future officers, but to also coach and mentor individuals within the law enforcement work force.

### Emotional Intelligence Emerges

During the 1940s, under the guidance of J.K. Hemphill, the Ohio State Leadership Studies recommended that "consideration" is an important aspect of effective leadership. Additionally, this research suggested that leaders who are able to establish "mutual trust, respect, and a certain warmth and rapport" with members of their group will be more effective.<sup>1</sup> Displaying positive emotional intelligence attributes appears to be just as important as avoiding destructive emotions when leading others.

In 1940, David Wechsler referred to “non-intellective” as well as “intellective elements,” which dealt more with affective, personal, and social factors <sup>2</sup>. In addition, as early as 1943, Wechsler continued to propose that non-intellective abilities are essential for predicting one’s ability to succeed in life <sup>2</sup>. Wechsler stated:

The main question is whether non-intellective, that is affective and cognitive abilities are admissible as factors of general intelligence. (My contention has been that such factors are not only admissible but necessary; in addition to intellective there are also definite non-intellective factors that determine intelligent behavior. If the foregoing observations are correct, it follows that we cannot expect to measure total intelligence until tests also include some measures of the non-intellective factors). <sup>2</sup>

During this same time frame, the Office of Strategic Services <sup>3</sup> (later to become the Central Intelligence Agency) developed a process of assessment that included the evaluation of non-cognitive, as well as cognitive abilities. This development evolved into the “assessment center” hiring or promotional process first used in the private sector at AT&T in 1956 <sup>3</sup>. Many of the things measured in the assessment centers then and now involve social and emotional competencies such as communication, sensitivity, initiative and interpersonal skills.

It appears that even fifty years ago when the topic of emotional intelligence was in its infancy, the importance of skills that seem social in nature were indeed very germane to the total person. Developing skills that did not measure standard intelligence was considered unique and different. Daniel Goleman, a Harvard-trained psychologist and a science writer for the New York Times, is concerned with how little traditional tests of cognitive intelligence told us what it takes to be successful in life. It appears that Goleman believes the totality of a person should be measured in order to gauge an accurate emotional summation. <sup>4</sup>

What defines success in life is somewhat subjective. Goleman makes a good point regarding the criteria that has been used for many years when determining who is best suited for certain jobs or promotions based on I.Q. tests <sup>4</sup>. Answering questions about history, science and completing mathematical equations may only measure a portion of an applicant’s total intelligence level.

Not all emotional intelligence scholars concur with Goleman’s research and conclusions, resulting in a variety of differing theories regarding the purpose of emotional intelligence in the workplace. According to Anthropologist Laura Nader, there is plenty of research regarding emotional intelligence in the work place for line level workers <sup>5</sup>. She notes a significant void, however, in the number of key leaders within the work place who are willing to be assessed on their personnel emotional intelligence levels <sup>5</sup> In addition, according to Fernandez-Araoz, qualitative research fails to account for significant portions of variance especially among top managers and senior leaders <sup>6</sup>.

According to Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, having a proper emotional intelligence inventory allows one to cope better during stressful situations. When psychologists began

to document and think about traditional intelligence, they focused on cognitive aspects, such as memory and problem solving. However, many of these researchers recognized that intelligence could also be measured by non-cognitive aspects <sup>7</sup>.

In 1983, Howard Gardner published information on multiple intelligence <sup>8</sup>. Gardner speculated that “interpersonal” and “intrapersonal” intelligences are as important as the type of intelligence typically measured by IQ and related tests. This is key because most law enforcement agencies at local, state and federal levels have not traditionally utilized interpersonal and intrapersonal assessments <sup>8</sup>. Many law enforcement agencies use psychological testing in the hiring process, however, little on going training is provided to officers regarding the importance of emotional intelligence once hired.

One of the most renowned experts and pioneers on the topic of emotional intelligence is Dr. Reuven Bar-On. Bar-On. He coined the term “EQ” (emotional quotient) which is used by Goleman and others to describe his approach to assessing emotional and social competence. Dr. Bar-On also created the Emotional Quotient Inventory (the EQ-i) in 1985 which is the first test of emotional intelligence to be published by a psychological test publisher <sup>9</sup>. Over one million EQi assessments have been conducted worldwide in the first five years since its publication, making it one of the most popular psychological tests to assess this critical aspect of a person’s capacity.

### EQ and IQ

One of the founders of the study of human intelligence is Alfred Binet, who also pioneered the field of psychological testing.<sup>10</sup> Binet was asked in 1904 by the French minister of public education to develop a test that could be used to identify children who would have problems in school so that they could be given special instruction. The Stanford-Binet intelligence scale (which is still in use today to assess IQ) was developed in 1916 when Lewis Terman, a psychologist from Stanford University, was able to translate the information into English and revised the tasks created by Binet and his counterpart Theodore Simon in 1904. Accepted for decades as “the measure” of intellect, the Stanford-Binet scale has faced increasing scrutiny for its limitations.<sup>10</sup>

According to Hunter and Hunter, significant research on the limits of IQ as a predictor was completed in the Sommerville study, a 40-year longitudinal investigation of 450 boys who grew up in Sommerville, Massachusetts. Two thirds of the boys were from welfare families, and one-third had IQ’s below 90. Interestingly, IQ had very little relation to how well they did at work or in the rest of their lives. What made the biggest difference were childhood abilities such as being able to handle frustration, control emotions, and get along with other people (traits consistent with those identified by Bar-On and others as components of Emotional Intelligence) <sup>11</sup>. These are the same types of attributes that could assist police officers in the future to be more successful if they could master these emotions. Handling frustration, controlling emotions and getting along with other people are some of the cornerstones of being a successful officer in today’s fast paced world. <sup>11</sup>

## The Potential of Emotional Intelligence

In the July 1999 issue of *Stress News*, Mark Slaski raised the question whether emotional intelligence (EQ) was a useful concept within the content of stress management. Slaski provided much of this information from emerging neuroscience evidence as well as stress management literature. Slaski basically states that individuals are believed to vary in their ability to perceive, process, and manage information which is emotional in nature. In other words, emotional intelligence is not just about emotions, but the ability for a person to use emotional information and combine it with thoughts and actions.<sup>12</sup> He suggested it would be more beneficial to deal with stress issues if the person took into account the importance of emotions.<sup>12</sup>

It is no surprise that police officers may have one of the most stressful occupations within today's work force. According to the Wall Street Almanac<sup>13</sup>, police officers have one of the top ten most stressful occupations in the United States. For years, police officers have been tasked with dealing with the wide range of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, excitement, frustration, and happiness just to name a few. Today's research on emotional intelligence suggests that police officers themselves could benefit from learning more about their own emotional intelligence levels.

Imagine what your organization would look like if there were less emotional outbursts from disruptive co-workers internally and less citizen complaints from the public regarding rudeness and un-professional behavior. With emotional intelligence awareness training, more life skills could be taught to our law enforcement professionals. This benefit could have lasting effects both on the job and in their personal lives.

According to Lazarus, treating stress and emotion as if they were separate fields is absurd. He notes where there is stress, there are also emotions. Lazarus believes if we accept these arguments, it would have a profound effect on the types of interventions that stress management practitioners develop. Recognizing the interdependence between stress and emotions, however, can enhance an individual's emotional intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

The implication of occupational stress for numerous organizations has been the focal point in recent years for high stress occupations. As a result, an increased recognition occurred making employers more accountable for the psychological, as well as the physical welfare of their employees.<sup>14</sup>

One study and intervention was completed in 1998 by Robert Clarke, who at the time was a police officer with a large United Kingdom police force. The study revealed that the police profession was considered one of the highest stress occupations in the United Kingdom. A variety of research identified some of the operational situations that give rise to stress such as court appearances, the delivery of sudden death notifications, lack of managerial support and work overload<sup>15</sup>. One of the most relevant issues regarding the future use of emotional intelligence within police departments is the emotionally charged situations that police officers have with their customers.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, many customers contacted by the police are suspects who have been accused of breaking the law and are about to be arrested. There is often an abundance of emotion for the officer to manage, most commonly manifesting itself as anger and frustration. Emotional stress in police services not only affects officers, but also impacts their partners and family members. According to Alexander and Walker it is not the dangers inherent in the job that caused the most problems, but shift work, long hours, cancelled leave and coping strategies employed by officers. With that stress comes a plethora of health related problems for police officers.<sup>16</sup>

For many years, there has been pressure from the British Government to reduce the number of health-related early retirements within police service. Initiatives to put this into effect have been quite successful, with a notable increase in officers returning to some form of duty with the reduced absenteeism. It later became apparent that a high proportion of the longer term absences were a direct result of stress related illness. According to the British Publication Managing Medical Retirements, medical retirements currently constitute 31 percent of all retirements for police officers.<sup>17</sup>

According to Rob Briner,<sup>18</sup> approaches to stress management consists of more than “providing gymnasium facilities, salads in the canteen or advice on how to quit smoking cigarettes.” Recognizing an effective stress management intervention would need to address much deeper psychological issues and the specific emotional aspects that characterized the work of an operational police officer with some work to develop an appropriate intervention.<sup>18</sup> Doctor Ken Hart conducted similar work with the police in his native Canada. Trained as a psychologist, Hart had the expertise to implement an effective intervention that examined the efficacy of the current stress management interventions<sup>19</sup>. Previous research took too broad of an approach on the topic of emotional intelligence<sup>19</sup>. Hart believed that a more specific look at emotional intelligence needed to occur to be effective.<sup>19</sup> Hart discovered that only the tip of the emotional intelligence iceberg had been researched in the past. This is important because law enforcement officers can still learn how emotional intelligence may be a bridge to reduce harmful stress.

### Current Research with the Police

Chemiss and Adler conducted an extensive study in which American police officers participated.<sup>20</sup> They designed an intervention during the study to develop emotional competencies which demonstrated an improvement in their overall performance. In addition, there was a belief that if police officers could learn to better understand and manage their own and others' emotions (particular anger), they could lower stress in their work life. Lower stress could mean happier and healthier police officers who live more productive lives.<sup>20</sup> The overall objectives for the intervention were:

- To heighten awareness
- To increase knowledge
- Change attitude and behavior

- Offer the opportunity to improve quality of life, reduce the risk of illness and improve productivity.

A series of one-day workshops was offered to officers and support staff members who regularly had face-to-face contact with the public (about 200 staff). The workshops incorporated a range of experiential exercises (meditation, visualization and biofeedback), lectures and questionnaires. The topics covered were:

- The causes and consequences of stress
- Biological & emotional responses to stress
- Stress coping strategies (perception, problem & emotional focused)
- Anger management (meaning; categories; sources; function & coping strategies).
- Workshops that give officers and support staff the ability to learn more about the effects of stress and how to better understand their personal emotion intelligence will result in greater personal growth.

One way to explore the link between stress and emotional intelligence for 100 officers who participated in the workshops was to ask them to complete a questionnaire. The survey was the Boston Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire based on the work of Weisinger<sup>21</sup> who defines EQ- as:

- Self-awareness
- Managing Emotions
- Self Motivation
- Relating to others; and
- Emotional Mentoring.<sup>21</sup>

During this study, a strong correlation was found overall between each of the five EQ abilities (self awareness, managing emotions that show the strongest relationships). It basically stated participants were able to understand and manage their emotions very well and reported lower levels of stress. These results were evident across the sample with no real differences evident regarding the age, gender, rank or length of service.<sup>21</sup>

Matthew and Zeidner found coping with stressful situations is central to emotional intelligence. In addition, it appeared to suggest emotional intelligence can be developed and makes a difference to the experience of stress. Widening our view of the stress experience within a broader context of emotions offers up real solutions to develop future interventions that make a real difference to the quality of working life. The research demonstrates that addressing the emotional well-being of individuals can possibly re-energize people within organizations.<sup>22</sup>

### What Can We Do?

Based on the research and results of initial testing and intervention, it would seem extremely beneficial for criminal justice agencies to explore providing emotional

intelligence training to their personnel. The police are very effective at putting bad guys in prison and keeping them there as long as possible. The stress of doing the job, however, comes at an extraordinary price. Don't we owe it to the people in law enforcement to provide them with all of the resources available so they can not only have a productive career but a healthy emotional outlook on life? Providing emotional intelligence training to officers makes sense.

The best trainers for emotional intelligence training would be qualified professionals who could team up with seasoned police officers from various ranks who had a trust based relationship with other members within the organization. The qualifications for those selected to instruct would be licensed clinical psychologist and certified police instructors through P.O.S.T. (Police Officers Standards for Training). If the training was conducted "in house" during normal training cycles, the cost would be minimal. Some states in the U.S. may be able to have the training certified through P.O.S.T., which would allow reimbursement to the agency. Train-the-trainer sessions would be required to ensure the instructors not only believed in the concept but really understood it. The train the trainer course would be taught by a licensed psychologist with a back ground in emotional intelligence. The course curriculum would begin with the basic EI intelligence concept with specific applications to the law enforcement profession. A training block should also be taught in the police academies to ensure that emotional intelligence training was not a foreign topic to new officers. Police Officers with a training background teamed with qualified and licensed professionals could teach this training anywhere from several hours to several days depending on the size of the agency and training budget (It is interesting to note POST has been deeply involved in reformatting the basic course to emphasize critical thinking and awareness of leadership, ethics and community policing; much of the affective domain of learning incorporates Bar-On's underlying theories).

According to Dr. Mac Hart, the founder of Police Interview.com,<sup>23</sup> law enforcement officers need to become emotionally smarter- successfully manage crime scenes, promote public safety and enhance their careers. Police officers need to work just as hard to develop their emotional intelligence as they do on more traditional law enforcement training. Dr. Hart, who has worked with police departments for over 20 years, believes police officers must be able to negotiate difficult situations by being emotionally in tune with themselves and the people around them.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

At present, there are no large metropolitan police departments using EQ assessment in hiring or conducting internal emotional intelligence training. The potential outcomes of adopting these strategies, though, are promising. Less stress, more emotionally aware staff, reduction in citizen's complaints, better arrests, improved family life with officers leaving the stress at the work place where it belongs.

If an applicant's emotional intelligence was measured prior to employment, prospective police employers could assess whether or not the applicant possessed the basic emotional skills requisite for any law enforcement officer. On the job, veteran officers who exhibit

emotional outbursts or anger management problems could be provided one-on-one emotional intelligence coaching to work on raising the emotional intelligence bar.

It is imperative for law enforcement agencies to embrace emotional intelligence testing and training for their new recruits as well as for tenured members of staff. To implement this approach, though, it would take hard work on the front end to venture into this new paradigm shift of police training. The benefits of cops with high EQ, however, would be absolutely worth the risk with so much to gain.

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