



IACTP
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CORRECTIONAL TRAINING PERSONNEL

The Correctional Trainer

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Emotional Intelligence Training

Many in the field of corrections realize the importance of emotional intelligence. It is what is missing in traditional staff training programs. Without it, we experience high staff turnover, low morale and many physical and psychological problems; including heart attacks, high blood pressure, suicide ideation, PTSD, depression and anxiety. The common cause in all these is poor relationships, and emotional intelligence skills training will counter that. But, how do you provide that training in an effective way that staff will embrace. That is what this paper will address.

First, what are the actual components of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, in his definitive work "Emotional Intelligence" (Goleman, 2006) states there are five aspects of emotional intelligence, which are:

1. **Self-awareness**; ability to recognize and understand our own emotions. It is the foundational building block of emotional intelligence, since regulating ourselves and having empathy for others all rely on identifying and understanding emotion in ourselves.
2. **Self-regulation**; be able to express, regulate and manage our emotions.
3. **Motivation**; motivated by personal reasons and work toward your own goals, not external rewards like gaining wealth, respect or fame.
4. **Empathy**; ability to understand how other people are feeling and recognize how you would feel in their position. It does not mean to sympathize with, validate, or accept their behavior, just that you can see things from their perspective and feel what they feel. Self-awareness and the motivation to connect with others are prerequisites for empathy
5. **Social skills**; ability to interact socially with others and successfully navigate social situations, effectively pursue their goals and get the outcomes they want when interacting with others. Understanding that we are all connected and our words and behavior impact others.

When officers learn emotional intelligence skills, this new sense of empowerment will improve their job effectiveness, morale and job satisfaction. A North Carolina DOC study showed that 25% of officers were assaulted by inmates in their first year. After 5 years, only 3% were assaulted. Some of the skills learned in those first years on the job were emotional intelligence skills. (Inmate, 2000) Having emotional intelligence training in orientation and regular in-service could have a significant impact on officer wellbeing. And, when a number of co-workers learn these skills, the work culture will positively change, impacting others. This could be, and has been, a game changer for many agencies.

Emotional Intelligence Training

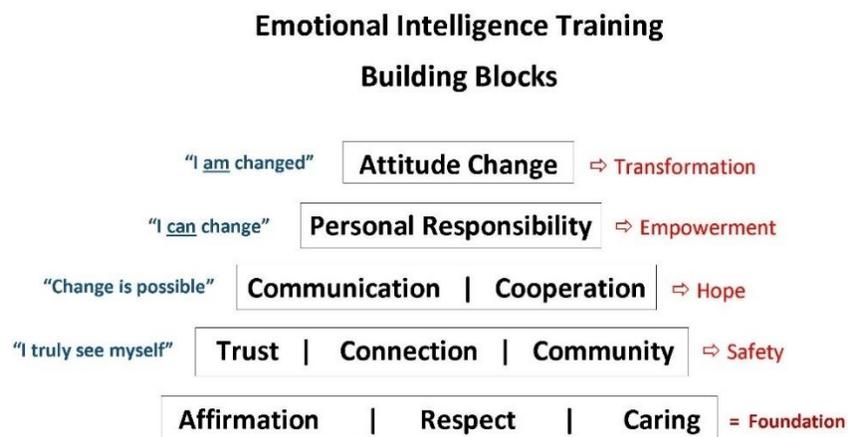
Traditional officer training is primarily through lecture. This type of training for emotional intelligence will not be effective nor generally accepted by staff. Once staff hear the training is about emotions many, if not most, turn off and they begin thinking about what they will be doing after they survive the training. During a training I provided for California training academy directors, several directors complained that they tried training in emotional intelligence but were

unsuccessful. I believe their frustration came from the fact that they trained by lecture and called it emotional intelligence training. The reason staff rejected the training is the result of a brain process called confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias happens when new information is presented which conflicts with already established information/beliefs based on previous experiences. A clear example of this is when someone gives you new information and you really respect them, you will be open to it. However, if you don't like or respect the person, you will reject, rationalize or ignore this new information. New information comes into the neocortex or thinking part of the brain, through the senses. But, before it gets there, it is filtered through the limbic system or subconscious part of the brain, which is where memory, emotions and learning centers are located. The limbic system is impacted by experience. It has no language, so experience affects it more than logic. This means an experience will have a greater and longer lasting effect than a lecture. Thus, if you present a topic called emotional intelligence, it will be filtered out. This is why a lecture on emotional intelligence will not be successful. An old saying is if you tell me, I will forget. If you tell me and show me, I will remember. But, if you tell me, show me and I experience it, I will understand. Emotional intelligence needs to be presented experientially and not called emotional intelligence.

The building blocks for the emotional intelligence training are shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1



These building blocks give an overview of the process the training moves through and has proven to be very effective as will be shown later in this paper.

Traditional officer training focuses on officer physical safety and hierarchy roles. Effective emotional intelligence training, on the other hand, focuses on both physical and psychological safety within the training itself, and this must be established at the onset. When staff feel safe, they no longer need to depend on their roles or identities and connect with each other through their shared humanity. This means titles are not used and all participants are equal. One effective method of achieving this is for participants to take on an adjective name, where they pick a positive adjective starting with the same letter as their first name, e.g., Jumping John, Inspirational Ivan, Realistic Rachael, etc. These names are used throughout the training creating a bond among participants. I met an officer two years after his training and he called to

me by my adjective name. Participants feel safe and connected and with a few community building exercises, they become open to change.

Self-Awareness

One of the most effective community building exercises is Concentric Circles, where participants talk about different topics in rotating pairs. As each person shares, you can actually see participants relax and become more comfortable. It is important to have some light and some deeper topics, like:

- A positive childhood memory of mine is
- Someone I really respect and why
- How my family handled conflict when I was growing up
- How I deal with conflict and handle my anger now

During this exercise there is often deep sharing and laughter. It may seem surprising that officers will share in this way, but in my 30 years, I consistently see it when safety has been established. Many staff share experiences they haven't thought about for years. This is part of the self-awareness experience and self-awareness is foundational for emotional intelligence. Self-awareness is what makes us human, resulting in humane conditions, practices, and beliefs. The culture in corrections is so strong, it overwhelms us, and our self-awareness is blocked. Officers must conform to survive, but a lack of self-awareness disconnects us from our core beliefs and values, with who we are, with our connection with and to others and with our humanity. Without self-awareness, we lack empathy, which is essential for healthy relationships, connection, and teamwork.

Training as a warrior gives officers a sense of power and an "us vs. them" mentality which tends to reduce empathy; since empathy and morality are in the same location in the brain, it can also negatively impact morality. Add to this the experience of chronic stress, which also reduces empathy, and you have a condition for concern. In organizations low in empathy, there is a tendency to also limit democracy and move toward totalitarian governance. (Segal, 2017) All of these work against teamwork, collaboration, and cohesion. Fortunately, not all officers succumb to this influence, but enough do to be problematic and create many of the issues officers face today.

It is important to note that the above discussion about self-awareness is not part of the content of the training. It is background information showing the importance of increasing self-awareness as part of emotional intelligence.

Understanding Emotions

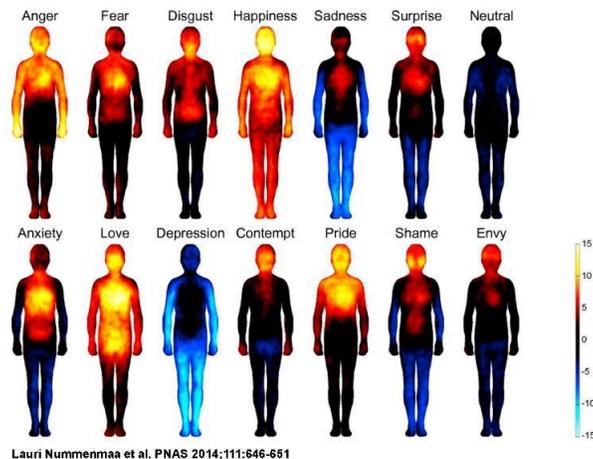
Emotions are located in the limbic part of the brain and serve a vital function for our wellbeing. We know what they are by how they make us feel in our bodies. That is why they are often referred to as feelings. They are one of two ways our subconscious communicates with us. The other is through our dreams. We could not survive without our emotions. They tell us if we are getting our needs met or not. Those needs are both physical and psychological. The physical needs are food, shelter, and safety. The psychological needs are for connection, meaning, control and fun. This is where emotional intelligence plays a key role. Our need for connection is because we are not strong enough or fast enough to survive on our own. We survive by being part of a community or larger group. In historic times, we banded together to defeat the saber-

tooth tiger. This is why churches; community groups and gangs are so significant for many people. We need each other to survive. We also have a need for meaning; to be recognized, appreciated, to feel like we matter and there is a reason for our existence. The need for control is over our own life, which gives us a sense of confidence that we can control events in our life to meet our needs in the future. The last basic psychological need is to have fun and enjoyment in life.

An important aspect of emotional intelligence is the self-awareness of our emotions and what they are communicating to us from our subconscious. Each emotion is unique and feels differently in our body. The following fMRI [Functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery] graphic shows brain activity by measuring the levels of blood flow in our body for different emotions. In Figure 2 below, yellow indicates high energy, red medium, blue shows low energy and black neutral.

Figure 2

Bodily topography of basic (Upper) and nonbasic (Lower) emotions associated with words.



Lauri Nummenmaa et al. PNAS 2014;111:646-651

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PNAS

When a person is angry, they may clench their jaw and fists and feel pressure in their chest. These locations are where there is high blood flow and feels like high energy ready to take action. [See the anger section below.] Love, on the other hand, has high energy in the face, chest and genital areas and depression has low energy in the extremities indicating a lack of energy and motivation to act. Emotionally intelligent people know their emotions and understand the role they play and how to use them to navigate life; to manage them rather than be controlled by them. For example, when someone gets angry, to understand the internal source of their anger, the awareness of which gives them a sense of control, so that they can resolve the issue rather than just flying off the handle. This is crucial for maintaining healthy relationships, being part of a team and it is part of self-awareness.

Understanding Stress

Another aspect of self-awareness is understanding stress; its purpose, its source, its effects, and how to manage it. The experience of the training, which is relatively stress free, when added to the understanding of stress, integrates the learning in the brain. The experience is registered in the limbic system in the brain and the content taught is in the neocortex or conscious part. They reinforce each other for a deeper understanding, which is so important since stress or chronic stress is so much a part of officers' lives. Part of this understanding is seeing the impact or consequences of stress in their lives. Some may feel they are going crazy, but with the understanding of the effects of stress and being given tools to manage it, they may no longer feel they are a victim of it. Some of those tools are adequate sleep, meditation, mindfulness, exercise, diet, and cognitive reframing, among others.

Understanding Anger

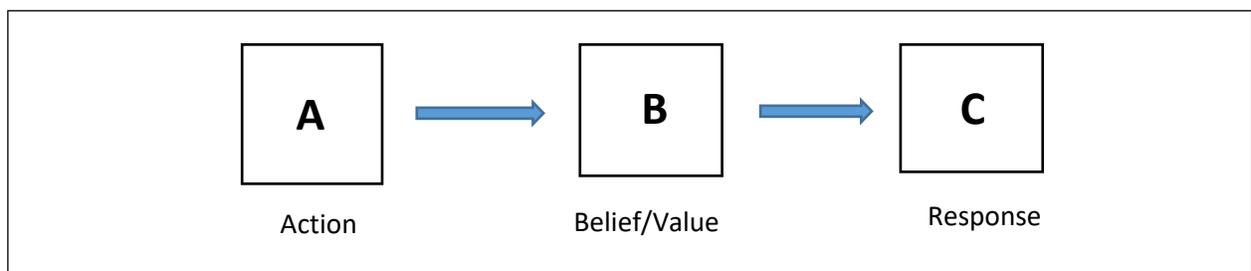
Anger is not a primary emotion. It is a secondary emotion, which gives us the awareness, motivation, and energy to change something that is unpleasant. Our primary emotion may be fear, embarrassment, or vulnerability, where we experience a sense of powerlessness. We then feel anger, and this gives us a sense of energy, focus and power to change the situation. One important lesson in self-awareness is that if we cannot change the situation, maybe the situation is meant to change us. Understanding the source and role of anger helps in learning to manage it. Also, realizing we have a number of ways we can respond when we get angry: suppress it, express it [explode], defuse it [reduce tension without addressing cause of anger], and transform it by changing our relationship to what got us angry. Transformation can include understanding what was triggered in us, how the other person was meeting their needs by acting the way they did and the role of forgiveness and acceptance as a powerful and healthy way to resolve anger.

Attitude

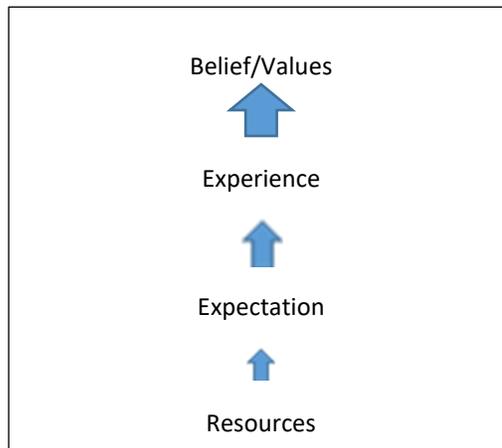
A spiritually empowering attitude that we are all connected, and part of a larger community is at the core of emotional intelligence. Without it, the skills learned can be used to manipulate and control others, rather than connect. Incorporated within this attitude is integrity and personal responsibility, that we are responsible for our own thoughts and actions. This is depicted in the following graphic on the ABC's of Responding. A is some action and B is that we process it in our brain and C is our response, which can be an action or emotion; an input-process-output model.

The sequence in Figure 3 is what normally happens. Someone does or says something or something happens, and we mentally process it and then respond by saying or doing something or we simply have an emotional response.

Figure 3.



The pathway to change an attitude lies in self-awareness. A helpful way to understand what is in the B box is if we use the B to stand for the acronym BEER. The B can represent our Belief/Value, the E our past life Experience, the second E our Expectations in the given situation and the R our resources, which are our skill set and our knowledge/information. Change comes from improving our Resources [emotional intelligence training] which will change our expectations [now that we have new skills] that will lead to new life experiences which will change our attitude [belief/values]. The experience of an emotional intelligence training can impact our attitude through all four levels of the B.



Interpersonal Communication

The interpersonal communication skills are not for command and control, but for connection, cooperation, and collaboration. The focus is learning from each other and problem solving together. Active Listening is about learning from the other person rather than convincing them you are right, and they are wrong. Assertiveness is about working toward both parties meeting their needs rather than aggressiveness, where you are meeting your needs at the other person's expense. Problem solving is about finding out what each person's needs are and working toward a win/win outcome. As mentioned earlier in the North Carolina DOC study, part of what staff learn after years on the job, are these interpersonal skills.

The final element of emotional intelligence training is teambuilding. This is the overall focus of the training including self-awareness, attitude, and interpersonal skills. Participants normally feel a strong bond with each other and a sense of personal responsibility to each other as well as to the members of their work team not currently taking the training. This bond continues well beyond the training itself. Because various departments and levels of staff take the training together, relationships between departments and levels of staff improve, especially supervisors and their staff. This turns out to be a transformational experience for the individuals and their departments. When enough staff take the training, the work culture in the agency can be transformed.

Results of Emotional Intelligence Trainings

When the title of the training is not emotional intelligence training, but something like teambuilding and conflict resolution, it is very well accepted by staff. The title of the training I do is Teambuilding Attitude Conflict Transformation, or TACT. The evaluations of TACT show staff are hungry for this type of experience. When I first offered this training some years ago, I trained 70% of the Philadelphia Prison System staff [who were mandated to attend] and their evaluations ran 70% excellent, 27% good and 3% fair. Over 6 months after the training, 82% of staff reported continuing to use the skills learned on the job and 87% off the job [including at home]. (Miller, 1998) These results are far superior to traditional training methods that produce only a 10%-30% retention rate. (National, 2012) The fact that the changed behavior was not temporary, indicates the change was in the limbic system of the brain. More recently in 2017-2018 when I trained staff in four prisons in North Carolina, the evaluations for the training were 77% excellent, 20% very good and 3% good and their evaluations for the facilitation was 90% excellent, 9% very good and 1% good. Staff value the training and appreciate administration for offering it to them.

Conclusion

This paper has described the theory and principles underlying emotional intelligence training. The actual two or three-day training is rather simple, yet effective. Staff can learn the process quickly after having experienced it themselves as participants. Several agencies have included the TACT training in their orientation and in-service trainings. One defensive tactics instructor improved his pass rate from 50% to 80% after taking the emotional intelligence training. Most of it is common sense. The training is engaging, energizing, empowering and enjoyable and has proven to be effective. Staff appreciate it being incorporated into their training and administration will value it as part of short-term morale building and long-term staff retention strategies. When the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel gave the training its 2004 [and 2018] Award of Excellent, the president of the association stated this training should be in every training academy, it is that important. If we want to improve staff wellbeing, we must look at new ways of training. If we keep doing what we've done, we will continue getting what we've got, and our staff are too important to let that happen.

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To see 100% of the staff comments, visit www.teamcrs.org.

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