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Bringing Emotional Intelligence to the Jesuit Business Academy: A Program for Deepening the Conversation among Students, Advisers and Faculty

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Abstract

An innovative program for teaching emotional intelligence to graduate business students and their academic advisers is deepening relationships between advisers and advisees, raising self- and social-awareness in the advising space, and bringing a shared sense of civility to the greater campus culture. It further creates effective coaching opportunities in student/adviser relationships, imbuing those relationships with curiosity, caring, trust, safety and civility, as well as with a common language and common discourse built upon mutual respect, truth telling, and genuine empathy. This discussion looks at the visible outcomes for our students and advisers, both within the business school and across campus, from fifteen years of experience in emotional intelligence training at Seattle University.

The photos in this article are provided by Hartley McGrath who is the director of the Dolomites EQ program and the lead course facilitator for all of our EQ programs. Detailed information about our EQ course and especially the annual Dolomites iteration of the course can be found at: <http://www.pauseconnect.com/dolomites-eq.html>

Introduction

In the summer of 2003, we first offered an experimental MBA course in Leading with Emotional Intelligence as an addendum to an annual two-week study tour to Italy. It was offered as an opportunity to hone emotional intelligence (EQ) skills while exploring the spectacular Dolomites mountain range of northern Italy, and it included a set of experiential activities that blended hiking with EQ training. Today, in early summer of 2018, we look forward to our 16th consecutive “EQ in the Dolomites” program in September, and we are offering the 51st iteration of our EQ course here in Seattle this summer. Leading with Emotional Intelligence has become the most popular elective offering in the MBA program, and it is the only business elective course to draw widespread participation from every graduate program on campus. In this article, we look at the impact teaching EQ to graduate students has had on the campus culture, both

within the business school and across the university, and on how the transference of EQ skills to the academic advising function is transforming the advising experience.



Learning Objectives

The formal learning objectives of our EQ training, whether it is being offered to graduate students or to academic and peer advisers, flow from the broader learning goals of our graduate programs at

Seattle University, and as such target knowledge and skill sets that are appropriate for professional development for both students and academic advisers:

1. To enhance both self- and social-awareness, and develop more effective self-management and relationship-management skills, accomplished through a reflective process drawn from the traditions of St. Ignatius.¹
2. To become more effective communicating with advisees and colleagues at all levels in the organization and with prospective advisees and future colleagues.
3. To learn and develop (through practice) capacity for staying in relationships (collegial, advisee/adviser, social, familial) with authenticity and integrity.
4. To develop strategies and tactics for influencing the organizational culture to foster authentic data flow (communications) among members of the organization.
5. To develop and hone skills for tempering the neural limbic system (“fight or flight” response) to replace impulsive and automatic response patterns with conscious choice patterns.
6. To learn skills and strategies for offering continuing education in harnessing more effectively the neural limbic system, for example, developing skills in facilitating Training Group (T-Group) encounters and exercises to practice choosing more effective communication patterns.
7. To develop effective skills in providing feedback to colleagues and advisees.
8. To develop and practice effective peer and professional coaching skills.

The main focus of this article is on the outcomes of the program that accrue to the campus culture, to our students’ personal transformation, and to the enhancement of the academic advising function.

Academic Advising and Emotional Intelligence

According to Fey, the “vision or mission of higher education . . . is in the business of developing

people,”² which includes the academic advisers themselves.³ This vision is very much in alignment with Jesuit philosophy on developing the whole person. According to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) statement of core values, advisers are responsible for “communication in useful and efficient way.”⁴ Clear and effective communication is a direct result of self-reflection and active contemplation in the Ignatian tradition. Those core values spell out the role of the adviser, which is to “engage in a series of intentional interactions for the purpose of facilitating student-learning outcomes.”⁵ Effective advising involves a close relationship and frequent interactions between adviser and advisee.⁶ According to Cuseo, the key roles and functions of the academic adviser are “(1) adviser as humanizing agent, who interacts in various environmental settings, 2) adviser as counselor or mentor, who offers guidance, support and listens, and 3) adviser as educator, who teaches strategies to obtain goals in school and personal life.”⁷ The Seattle University Jesuit mission inspires advisers to empower their students. In these roles, the academic adviser is expected to create a communal environment for students, one whose sole purpose is to help students be successful and reach their full human potential. It is not just about getting students a degree and landing a job; it is also about educating the whole person. Good advisers value and take into consideration the student’s personal and vocational discernment. Additionally, Kerr states that “the most significant impact of colleges and universities has resulted from their influence on the personal development of their students,” which should be modeled by the academic adviser.⁸

Student Development Theory and Emotional Intelligence

Students continuously face a plethora of challenges stemming from all areas of their personal, professional and social lives. Often these challenges affect their academic and/or work performance. It is important to have an understanding of various student development theories that define the principles of student growth and success. One especially helpful theory is Arthur Chickering’s psychosocial theory of student development.⁹ His seven vectors of development posit that student development is a

succession of five stages: (a) thinking, (b) feeling, (c) behaving, (d) valuing, and (e) interacting. At Seattle University we intentionally connect these stages to the journey of Jesuit spiritual development, and we explore how an individual relates to oneself and to others with an experiential focus on raising the EQ dimensions of self-and social-awareness.¹⁰

The second of Chickering’s developmental vectors is managing emotions (other vectors include developing autonomy, freeing interpersonal relationships, and developing integrity). Recognizing and building awareness around emotions such as anxiety, anger, fear and depression enable graduate students to think through the feelings, to understand them, and to harness them as agents of effective choice instead of impulsive reactivity. In our Leading with Emotional Intelligence training program, graduate students and advisers go beyond cerebral learning

and understanding to actively applying these new skills to their practice directly and in the moment.

Chickering’s theory states that it is the adviser’s responsibility to help students develop their emotional management skills. This in turn helps advisers develop and deepen their own interpersonal skills. Jordan infers that professionals in the field of academic advising must be concerned with setting the stage for and taking action on their own [personal] development as well as that of the students they serve.”¹¹

Innovative Aspects of the EQ Training Program

While there are, of course, many other course elements in addition to those outlined below in Table 1, we believe the following four particular aspects of the program account for the major transformational outcomes of the experience.

Table 1

Innovative Elements	Related Outcomes
Professional Coaching Module	Safe space creation, curiosity, caring, patience
T-Group Training	Awareness, transparency, clarity, presence
Personal Narrative Exercise	Empathy, resiliency, worldview, community
Three-Day Immersion Experience	Connection, openness, integrity, mutual caring

The first three of these elements will be briefly discussed later in this article; the fourth is the container in which these elements become most intensively practiced.

Program Development and Implementation

To begin with, the case for introducing emotional intelligence to both academic advisers and graduate students emphasizes the professional benefits to a campus culture that is transparent and empowered to share truths, something we often refer to as improving authentic “data flow” throughout the organization. We argue that an employer gains the most from its investment in employees when their interactions within the organization are open and honest, and least when those interactions are a blend of (a) framing our messages so that our colleagues hear them, (b) framing our messages with language that we think

our colleagues will understand, and (c) using language that reflects the institution’s mission (or company line)—the organizational version of Orwellian *Nespeak*.¹² Conger states that “business language confines itself to more rational, logical approaches [and that] there is a tendency to avoid emotional expressiveness.”¹³ He suggests that this over-emphasis on the mechanical and under-emphasis on the emotional severely limits the quality of communication in organizations.

In making our case for teaching EQ in a business curriculum and developing EQ skills in academic advisers, we tend not to lead with the argument that it helps create a culture of mutual respect, civility, integrity, humane caring, and empathy. That might be a compelling argument for an elective course in psychology, social work, or pastoral studies, but it is a harder sell among our business colleagues (e.g., students, faculty,

advisors, administrators, and so forth). We do, however, use this case for teaching EQ to academic advisers. And we should be able to argue, based on our years of working in organizations that exhibit the extremes of workplace dysfunction, that a discipline that promotes mutual respect, support, empathy, community, and caring also has a legitimate, and ultimately profitable, place in a graduate business curriculum.



Our main case for implementing emotional intelligence training in our MBA program, as well as in our adviser-training regimen, relied on a more direct appeal to educating professionals for a dynamic and uncertain future. Here is the wording of that premise, as we presented it fourteen years ago and as we continue to defend the program:

Leaders today are confronted by daunting challenges: globalization of the economy, rapid changes in technology, and shifting business and education models—all at an ever increasing rate of change. Whether an organization proves agile enough to survive and thrive will depend on the degree to which its leaders can manage their own emotions in the face of escalating change. Emotionally competent leaders think clearly under pressure, make effective strategic decisions, and adapt to shifting business and academic climates with flexibility and focus. A leader exercising these capacities has a profound impact on others, serving to mitigate reactivity, build trusting relationships, and keep the focus on what matters—delivering business results.¹⁴

Analysis of Key Factors Responsible for the Program's Success

One key factor in starting the kind of program we discuss in this article is a willingness on the part of our academic leadership (e.g., deans, department chairs, program directors, academic advisers, curriculum committees) to trust a new, innovative and potentially highly beneficial experiment. Almost every graduate program provides opportunity to offer experimental courses as a way of adapting to an ever-changing world context. Certainly a course in Leading with Emotional Intelligence did not immediately resonate with all of our colleagues in accounting, finance, marketing, and business analytics. Thankfully, it was a much easier “sell” to our academic advising team due to their embracing holistic development philosophies. We asked our teaching colleagues to suspend judgment, to allow one experimental course offering and thereby give our proposal a fair hearing, and then assess its value based on student feedback.

We were fortunate to have an academic leadership willing to let us try our program with one of our experimental course offerings, especially since it would be first implemented nine time zones away and at elevations reaching over 8000 feet! Fortunately, the feedback from our clients was very positive from the first iteration of the course, and for the next fifteen years it has remained the most highly-rated elective course in the business school curriculum. The annual late-summer section of the course that regularly includes a 9-day immersion experience in the Italian Dolomites is one of the marquee features that the business school puts front and center in all of our recruiting materials and forums.

Summary of Significant Outcomes

We can now confidently offer some concrete observations from our fifteen-year experiment with delivering an experiential program to enhance emotional intelligence skills and sensibilities. Rather than focus on the demonstrable personal benefits that accrue to those taking more emotional intelligence to their future professional lives, we want to emphasize the positive impact on our student culture and on our advising culture, both within the business

school and across campus. This is reflected objectively in exit interviews and focus group feedback, as well as in participant satisfaction surveys. Here is a summary of those messages:

1. There is a sense of community and camaraderie that was unexpected by those pursuing a largely part-time, professional MBA program.
2. There is a spirit of community and caring that spans all graduate programs across campus, elevating a sense of identity with the university as a whole. Again, this outcome is in direct alignment with our Jesuit mission and identity.
3. The expressed greater mission of the university—"empowering leaders for a just and humane world"—comes alive in the EQ course experiences. The EQ programing is seen by students and advisors to be in service of, and in integrity with, the university mission statement--an example of our institution "walking its talk."¹⁵
4. The "just and humane world" referenced in the university mission is encapsulated and exemplified by the open and vulnerable relationships developed in the EQ course experience.
5. There is a noticeable change in the worldviews of our graduate students and advisers that derives from the methodology used in teaching EQ, almost in direct relation to the Jesuit model of teaching:
 - a. Graduate students and advisers see each other differently—with more empathy and understanding, and with more awareness of human complexity.
 - b. Graduate students and advisers both care more—for each other, for the university mission, for a higher discernment for their own future contributions to their organizations and to their communities.
 - c. Graduate students and advisers see the world through a lens more filtered by acceptance, charity, mutual interdependence, and resilience.
6. Graduate students and advisers acquire a common language with which to

communicate more transparently and more intimately with each other, replacing off-putting assertions with "I" statements that truthfully convey feelings as feelings, wants as wants, observations as observations, and stories as stories.

Discussion: EQ Training as a Campus-wide Unifying Learning Experience

Emotional intelligence skills taught explicitly to enhance "data flow" within work environments yield an unintended consequence. They help to create an organizational culture that promotes collegiality at a visceral and meaningful level. The following discussion looks at several examples of how this outcome unfolds from three of the modalities we regularly employ in this training.



T-Group Practice

One of the learning modalities we use in teaching emotional intelligence is the traditional T-Group (Training Group). T-Group training creates a unifying communication framework that draws students closer to each other with experiences of sharing and communion. The T-Group helps build visceral connections among participants, drawing them together with a willing openness and a skills set that enhances trust, empathy, personal safety, intimacy, caring, curiosity, and mutual respect.¹⁶

We have been using the T-Group in our EQ programming for 15 years, and we can attest to its impact on our campus culture at Seattle University. The program now draws participation from across the graduate school student bodies,

including graduate students from the College of Education, School of Law, School of Theology and Ministry, College of Science and Engineering, and College of Arts and Sciences, and from such disparate graduate programs as student development, educational psychology, pastoral studies, public administration, sports management, fine arts management, educational leadership (doctoral studies), nursing, software engineering, finance, accounting, business analytics, guidance and counseling, and law.

Students visiting this MBA elective from across campus frequently quip that they were expecting to be in classes teeming with budding Gordon Gekko stereotypes (the anti-hero in the movie *Wall Street*), and were surprised and relieved to find themselves among classmates they describe now as caring, generous, sincere, vulnerable, soft, welcoming and trustworthy.

The cross-campus appeal of this MBA elective course has been a unifying force for graduate students and advisers throughout Seattle University. Stories that traditionally divide business students (the “Gordon Gekko” stories) from law students (the “greedy corporate lawyers” stories) from fine arts students (the “dramatic, emotive and eccentric” stories) melt away under the artfully directed regimen of the T-Group. It may come across as a cliché, but we believe our EQ programming, particularly the dynamics of the T-Group, helps diverse graduate students see each other as whole people and as human and spiritual beings.

Autobiography Exercise

This brings us to one of the most powerful experiences in our EQ curriculum. The first day of our required three-day residential retreat is devoted to a personal narrative exercise. Following in the footsteps of St. Ignatius’ well renowned retreats, these three days allow space for reflection and self-discovery. Participants come to the retreat having written four-page abridgments of their life stories. We encourage everyone to be as transparent as they feel comfortable being, noting that they are substantially “formed” in life by the challenges they have faced, by the peaks and valleys of their pathways, and by their struggles and resilience.

This invites a look at parts of their lives they rarely share and, in many cases, rarely revisit.

It will come as no surprise to academic advising professionals that life is not, despite the old song, “just a bowl of cherries.” In our autobiography assignment participants spend six to eight hours with members of their T-Group, comprising from five to seven individuals. Each person shares his or her story with this small group of colleagues, and each person hears the personal stories of each of the other members of the T Group.



By nightfall on the first retreat day, the mood has become noticeably somber, contemplative, and, for many, liberating. In our formal debriefing of the day’s activities people speak to the impact from the day’s sharing of personal stories. It might seem a reckless generalization to say that everyone’s worldview is changed by the experience, but that is what comes back to us over and over from these debriefings. We regularly have participants who repeat our EQ course experience, usually from four to five veterans in each class. They speak compellingly to the permanent change in how they see the world and how they see other people, from having first done the autobiography activity a year or several years before. Those doing the activity for the first time have a penetrating sense that they will never see life quite the same, a sense that is reinforced by the testimony of those who have come before them.

This change in worldview was never the goal of our autobiography exercise. In our T-Group work, the members of each group interact almost exclusively in the “here and now,” and our

facilitators vigilantly keep that dialogue in the present. There is no opportunity for back-story or for learning much about the personal histories represented in the group. Sending the members on a full day of sharing their life stories provides back-story to the people seated in their T-Group circles. Our purposes in framing the autobiography experience are (a) to dispense with the predictable and understandable complaints by T-Group members that they never get to know the people in their circle—since the “here and now” leaves out their histories, and (b) to offer a concrete experience of being accepted, non-judgmentally, even upon sharing that which is often held to be dark, unacceptable, and unsharable. The experience further liberates individuals to be open and truthful in subsequent T-Group interactions.



Coaching Module

We begin our EQ training regimen with a primer on coaching, which includes a written introduction to the art of coaching, a live demonstration of effective coaching technique, and an off-site practice assignment where three students help each other hone their active listening and “coaching space” creation skill sets.

From the outset, we hold our student participants, and especially our academic advisers, to be capable of achieving and applying appropriate skills in the service of helping each other move forward in their lives. Our graduate students and their advisers are accomplished professionals (aerospace and software engineers, project managers, biomedical researchers, student development professionals, and so forth) who

possess the intellectual heft to take on the challenges of effective coaching—ironically, to take on the precise interpersonal skills that, undeveloped, have been an anchor on the career growth of many of our students. In addition, in line with our university’s mission statement, the coaching primer and practice promotes holistic development and growth.

We are able to bring our participants to an impressive level of coaching finesse in a short time. The off-site simulations surprise all participants in the depth of insights that emanate from the exercise. Students report that they take their newly formed active listening skills to their work relationships with notably positive results. Based on this feedback, the participation rate of advisers has increased dramatically as they focus on using more EQ in their professional interactions.

Effective coaching behavior is both a means to enhancing emotional intelligence as well as an expression of EQ. People with high EQ are effective coaches. Coaching, as a modality learned and applied in our EQ program, helps develop EQ skills for both the coach and the “client.”

Empathic Listening — The Foundation for Effective Coaching

Empathic listening is, according to Covey, the “key to effective interpersonal communication.”¹⁷ “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” is his mantra for the most effective listening. Achieving this skill involves a shift in mental models. It is more important for many of us to be understood first and to listen second. Individuals often think about how the words of the speaker relate to *their* story and how they are going to reply.¹⁸ Covey states that “most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They’re either speaking or preparing to speak. They’re filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people’s lives.”¹⁹

This calls for a deeper level of listening called empathic listening. This level of listening allows the listener to become a part of the other person’s reality, entering into his or her frame of reference. At this level, the listener sees where the other

person is coming from and understands how the other person feels.²⁰ Runde and Flanagan assert that the “entire purpose of [listening] for understanding is to grasp the words, context, and emotion of the speaker.”²¹ It is the only way to comprehend the reality of what is being said.²²

Experts agree that academic advisers should possess the following skills in dealing with students and colleagues: (a) good communication skills, (b) good speaking and writing skills, and (c) good interpersonal skills.²³ According to Luntz, “the majority of human communication is nonverbal.”²⁴ This is one reason why emotional intelligence is vital for effective communication and framing. In a perfect world, all graduate students and all advisers would be comfortable enough to be completely honest with emotional responses when communicating. Unfortunately, when humans learned to quantify, they created boundaries.²⁵ People have taught themselves through these learned boundaries to refrain from emotionally expressing themselves. Our fast-paced society does not always allow for the critical self-reflection and awareness required for deeper and more authentic connection with self and others.

Kouzes and Posner and many other leadership theorists also note that developing EQ skills is “absolutely essential to authentic leadership.”²⁶ Developing emotional intelligence skills can help us break down boundaries that keep us from connecting with others by understanding the feelings and empathizing with the feelings of others.

Regrettably, we have limited training and education in learning how to listen so that we deeply understand another human being from that individual’s own frame of reference.²⁷ This is why an EQ course provided to graduate students and advisers is crucial for the enhancement of their personal and professional development, their communication skills and their connectedness. Our goal is to guide and train graduate students and advisers in developing the competencies and skills to become active and empathic listeners.

EQ Training and Ignatian Pedagogy

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius encourages spiritual directors to “put the best interpretation

possible” on the words of the other, to give one another the benefit of the doubt and to refrain from judgment while seeking understanding. This admonition is front and center in our framing of the “Autobiography Exercise,” in our coaching module, and in our introduction to the dynamics of the T-Group. Indeed, all three of these learning modalities embrace the spirit of the Ignatian pedagogical model. And all three embrace reflection as “a fundamental component of Ignatian pedagogy linking action and experience to learning.”²⁸

In addition, the framework and application of the Ignatian Examen (we use the Spanish noun for “test” to label this key element in the Ignatian reflection imperative) is an important part of our immersion experience. During our three-day program retreats (nine days in the Dolomites) we schedule structured opportunities for the kind of deep and introspective reflection that is found in the twice-daily Examen that Ignatius expected of his brothers. On our retreats we begin and end each day with our own EQ version of that deeply reflective focus—we call our Examen sessions “overnight mail” and “after-dinner mail,” and draw from these reflective periods to synthesize the more poignant and transformational experiences of each day.

Finally, one of St. Ignatius’s great insights was that we detect the presence of God in the awareness of our emotions. Anxiety, apprehension, joy, unease—all of these are invitations for us to explore our interior life, not in judgment, but as a way of noticing where we might be called to attend more fully to the needs of our body, mind and spirit. In so many ways, Ignatius was laying out the pedagogy that we employ today in the teaching of emotional intelligence—400 years later.²⁹

Implications for Future Practice and Replication

Our hope is that EQ training will expand deeper through the campus community at Seattle University, bringing transformational cultural change to more and more graduate programs. Ultimately we would like to see EQ programming in our undergraduate curricula, thereby bringing transformative growth to a more impressionable,

and perhaps more vulnerable, age group. The benefits of doing this would accrue not just to our young graduates in their early-career experiences, but also to their employers, to their future colleagues, and to their families.

In addition to working with our students and academic advisers, we have begun to offer short, EQ training interventions with staff and faculty throughout the university. In the past two years we have offered training to employees in our Enrollment Services and University Advancement divisions, as well as with the Alumni Affairs Office, the business school administrative staff, the Office of Campus Ministry, and the Office of Ignatian Identity. We have been invited multiple times by the chair of the professional staff development committee at the business school to conduct workshops. We believe this outreach to other members of our campus community represents a fertile opportunity to further stretch the shared experience of our EQ training to the benefit of a campus culture enriched by

understanding, caring, transparency, empathy, and resiliency.

Our enthusiasm for sharing and spreading the benefits of EQ is unbounded. If other academic institutions and programs were interested in giving EQ a try, we would gladly offer our time and our energies to help in that process. Honestly, we have seen such a dramatic shift in the cultures of our graduate programs that we would do whatever is possible to help bring this transformation to other academic communities. Please do not hesitate to ask for our help.

Finally, we close by sharing the words of George Ganss, S.J., which we believe inform and validate everything we do in our teaching of emotional intelligence: “A true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate goal, and simultaneously with respect to the good of those societies of which, as a human being, he is a member.”³⁰ HJE



Notes

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