Emotional Intelligence in Professional Sports

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Over the past one hundred and twenty years, a body of research has gradually been developed by psychologists in the area of multiple intelligences. Experts now conclude that there are 9 types of intelligence, including verbal/linguistic; logical/mathematical/visual; kinaesthetic and emotional. In the 1995 Daniel Goldman published the book entitled Emotional Intelligence, which popularized the understanding of emotional competencies for success in business and relationships and subsequently the term “emotional quotient” (EQ) was coined.

Research indicates that our success in life and in work is attributable about 80% to emotional intelligence and only about 20% to our cognitive intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (or “EI”) involves the critical ability to recognize various emotional states in oneself and others, to assess how emotions affect behaviour, and the ability to actively choose the most effective emotional state to manage a particular situation.

While one’s IQ is believed to be determined at birth, EI is a capacity that can be developed over time with proper support and training. Today, Emotional Intelligence coaching has become the fastest-growing area of life and executive coaching in the world.

Why Emotional Intelligence is a Critical Factor in Sport

Some of the “competencies” associated with EI include: accurate awareness of self and personal power; service and organizational awareness; emotional self control; resilience; achievement drive; powerful influence; conflict management and teamwork. It has been determined that EI is essential in both individual and team sports and can be the key factor in an athlete’s functioning within a team setting. In other words, Emotional Intelligence is a critical factor in determining whether or not an athlete wins and EI often ‘makes or breaks’ a team.

Research conducted on EI and athletic performance illustrates, for instance, that EI capacities have a direct effect on self regulation and mindset. For example, “Emotionally intelligent people can get themselves into the appropriate emotional states for the demands of the situation. If the situation requires high arousal, as in the case of athletes in our study, emotionally intelligent people are good at getting themselves psyched up. Equally, if the situation requires calmness, emotionally intelligent people are good at relaxing themselves.”

Emotionally intelligent athletes are able to:

- Manage their stress better
- Identify and change negative emotions that are blocking performance
- Remain in better physical health (e.g. decrease in anxiety attacks, headaches, back pain)
• Experience maximum concentration
• Respond more positively to athletic coach’s feedback, criticism and direction
• Play their sport with more confidence
• Be less impulsive
• Remain more flexibility with trades, team transitions etc.
• Maintain more consistent play
• Maintain and increase their positive mindset and get over mistakes and failures better
• follow through more successfully on personal goals

Emotionally intelligent athletes in a team setting are more effective at:

• Minimizing conflict with teammates, coaches, trainers
• Enhancing team play in games (e.g. a new hockey draft with a high EI quotient will share the puck more readily)
• communicating better with teams and rally team effort (especially important for team captains)
• performing better in interviews
• seeing themselves as part of the team vision
• thinking and acting respectfully to league organization and administration
• remaining loyal to their team, coach and teammates

While EI training is in fact implemented by a handful of sport psychologists, relatively few professional athletes and professional sport teams have yet to take up EI training with the seriousness required to maximize athletic performance and success. It is our projection at Move Mountains that EI will gradually be taken up more broadly in the field of sports and will in fact become viewed as a fundamental and essential form of training for winning teams over the next 10-15 years.

Research shows the best way to develop a higher quotient of emotional intelligence is to work with a life or performance “coach” trained in emotional intelligence coaching.iii At Move Mountains, we offer our athletes the latest in EI assessments and coaching. Your EI assessment is conducted and interpreted by a clinical psychologist, specially trained in EQI and your Emotional Intelligence coaching is provided by a performance enhancement coach with specialized training in coaching emotional intelligence.

For more information on Emotional Intelligence Coaching contact The Move Mountains Group at 1.800.750.3177 or visit www.prohockeymindset.com.

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iii See The Coaching Compass: Vol. vii; issue 41.

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