

Is Emotional Intelligence the Key to Better Cross-Selling in Law Firms?



In the legal industry, knowledge is power. In its traditional sense, that phrase may conjure notions of a zero-sum game: I win, you lose. In recent years, however, the business world has begun recognizing a new key to success: emotional intelligence.

Not only does emotional intelligence increase your ability to be personally more successful, it also can lead to greater team and firm success. Unfortunately, it is often overlooked and seldom leveraged.

For almost 30 years, psychologists and clinicians have been analyzing emotional intelligence, which is inherent in everyone and can also be practiced and improved. Sometimes called EQ, emotional intelligence (or emotional quotient) is the capacity to be aware of, control and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically. And it could hold the key to better cross-selling in law firms.

Four Skills You Need to Master for Higher EQ

EQ is broken down into four skills that roll up into two main competencies: Personal competence and Social competence. Within those two competencies lie the skills you

must possess to operate with optimum focus when negotiating cross-selling relationships with peers, clients and potential clients.

The two main competencies break down into these four main skill areas of focus:

PERSONAL COMPETENCE	SOCIAL COMPETENCE
Self-Awareness	Social Awareness
Self-Management	Relationship Management

Within each skill, simple improvements can drastically change the relationships you have with clients and colleagues. By working to raise all four, the sky is the limit as to what you can achieve in your relationships and your practice.

Self-Awareness

When it comes to cross-selling, self-awareness plays two different roles: being aware of your own emotions and tendencies while also being remarkably clear in understanding what you do well.

With a lower EQ, you may be victim to higher levels of stress and urgency, which you might project onto others. While directness is part of having a high self-awareness, that direct communication should be delivered with a calm, even tone. The attorney with a high EQ will be able to keep logic and emotion separate in the event of an emergency with a client.

Additionally, when you are being cross-sold into a relationship, many attorneys will quickly raise their hand and say, “I do that kind of work,” just so they can bill more hours. Unfortunately, this positions them as generalists. Clients need specialists. If you’re brought in and perform at an average level just because you wanted the engagement, you may damage the relationship. Be humble and patient and wait for the work that is truly in your areas of strength.

Self-Management

Self-management means having the ability to be flexible in a situation. High-EQ individuals are much more aware of their emotions and direct them in a constructive, positive manner. By being more aware of your emotions and triggers, you will exhibit a calm persona, which is what all clients want to see in a crisis.

From an internal marketing standpoint, high levels of self-management will increase your value as you cross-market yourself. Do you think your colleagues want to introduce the hot-tempered or panicked attorney to their clients? An attorney who has built up a valuable client will not bring a combative colleague into the relationship for fear that the client will be less than impressed.

The key here is to be aware of your emotional levels. When you feel tension, anger or frustration rising up, look to the solution rather than focusing on the problem. It will keep the steam of your teakettle in check.

Social Awareness

People with a high social awareness score are adept at identifying emotions and reactions in others, even if they don't feel the same way as the person they're talking to. Listening and observing are critical to a high EQ, and they are critical when working with your clients.

Your ability to ask questions and truly listen can make or break your ability to build your practice. One of the top rules in sales is to ask questions and listen for where you can add value. Telling a client what you can do for them without first being empathetic to their needs will cut off your ability to foster the relationship — you will be perceived as a taker, not a problem solver.

Emotional Intelligence and Relationship Management

Relationship management is the three previously discussed characteristics combined into one. When you are well aware of your own emotions, as well as those of the

individuals you're interacting with, you will possess a greater ability to manage the interaction and achieve ideal results. This is more than simply making sure you don't lose a client. It is about truly creating a relationship versus creating a business matter.

In a cross-selling situation, your ability to engage and fully develop a relationship is massively important. The key is for all legal professionals involved in the relationship to care about and engage the client at similar levels. If you are the person from your firm who doesn't listen to the client with empathy, loses interest in the engagement because you don't see eye-to-eye with the client, or convey negativity in communication, you will stand out like a sore thumb on the firm's roster.

Consistent, positive and empathetic communication is key to conveying your worth to the client as a valuable relationship.

While there are numerous skills that you can spend time on to enhance your practice, emotional intelligence is something you can and should practice all the time — with any situation you face. Increasing knowledge in your practice area is always a plus when interacting with clients and cross-marketing, but all the knowledge in the world is useless if you can't properly manage your interactions with others.

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