

How to go from good to great

RACHEL SETTI explores the difference between being a good and a great lawyer.



Who is the most notable lawyer you have ever worked with? What sets them apart: exceptional knowledge of the law; capacity to secure excellent outcomes for their clients; commitment to the profession; wisdom? Undoubtedly it is all these things and more, although I hazard a guess that their ability to inspire others is also a standout – after all, they inspired you.

In my experience of working with lawyers, the determining factor separating good from great lies not in the capacity to apply the law well – all good lawyers do this – but in the ability to engage, influence and understand themselves and others. This ability is often referred to as emotional intelligence (EQ). One of the basic elements of EQ is an individual's ability to monitor their emotional state and regulate emotional impulsiveness.

Inspirational lawyers and leaders have this ability in spades. Though they

experience the same negative emotions as others, including anger, sadness and frustration, they regulate their responses appropriately and productively. People with high EQs:

- understand what drives their behaviour
- possess insights into their intrinsic motivations
- display vulnerability when appropriate
- admit to mistakes
- seek support and feedback to learn and grow.

Enhancing your EQ

The good news is that unlike IQ, which is often considered to be relatively fixed and stable, you can improve your EQ. It involves increasing your self-awareness and exploring your interpersonal and intrapersonal style.

Like many worthwhile endeavours, developing your EQ is a multifaceted and ongoing process. The best way to start is by making an effort to truly listen – both to yourself and to others.



Listening to yourself

Start by noticing your emotions and your response to them. For example, are there certain people or situations you find difficult to navigate? When you encounter them, what happens to you physically and emotionally? Do you get butterflies in your stomach or experience mood shifts? Think about what you say to yourself in such situations. Perhaps you imagine a negative outcome before it has even happened.

Now, turn your attention to the impact your self-talk and emotions have on your behaviour. Do you get irritable, evasive or curt? Tracking these observations and noting them is often a useful way to expose patterns.

As an example, one of my clients, a successful senior executive, found it difficult to engage in small talk at networking events. Success had come through her sharp intellect and excellent application of her craft. However, her career progress had plateaued, which she

realised was related to her interpersonal style. She started to address this by observing her emotions and self-talk, and noticed that in networking and similar situations she felt agitated, frustrated and annoyed. She then sought feedback from others to gain a more rounded view of the way her behaviour was perceived. By examining her thoughts, emotions, behaviours and motivations she was able to shift her default patterns and create a new approach to networking with a more positive set of responses.

Listening to others

A second aspect of developing EQ involves active listening, which refers to processing the words being delivered. However, this is not the end of the story – most effective listening occurs when you focus on the subtext of the conversation. This is because clues are presented in many ways through tone, body language, posture, repetitions

and omissions. The process of piecing together the true meaning behind what people say is often referred to as using your 'third ear'. It is rather like putting together a puzzle, except there is no fancy picture on a box to guide you. Instead, you need to rely on hunches and intuition, which is tested as you communicate through conversation and questions with another person.

You can improve your EQ by developing your third ear. During conversations, avoid offering advice (initially at least) and listen with an open mind. Remain in the moment rather than thinking ahead. Pay attention to what is going on with the other person by being aware of all the messages they present, both verbal and non-verbal. Then follow through with insightful questions and reflections to clarify your understanding of their message. This type of approach indicates to others that you are listening and are genuinely interested in what they have to say. It encourages them to invest in their relationship with you.

A competitive edge

With so many aspects of the legal profession now involving electronic interactions, having the ability to build strong human relationships will give you a competitive edge. Building your EQ can help you get there.

The capacity to change and adapt is essential for progress and growth, so remember to recognise your interpersonal challenges. We all have them. Encourage and enhance your development through reading, finding an inspirational mentor, working with coach or other endeavours. **LSJ**



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