

Strengthening your facilitation EQ enables you to better prepare, manage, and deliver your presentations.

Ready for Center Stage

BY MICHAEL BRENNER



As a management consultant and facilitator for 15 years, and a professional musician for about 25 years, I've applied what I've learned as a performer to my work delivering leadership and team development programs. Take emotional intelligence (EQ). Whether facilitating a program on conflict management to a team of pediatric nurses or playing music in front of 500 club patrons, the EQ that I exhibit (or don't) can mean the difference between success and failure.

In a musical context, this variable might be called performance EQ; in a training context, I call it facilitation EQ (F-EQ). Strengthening your F-EQ will help you better manage your emotions and those of your participants, empathize with your audience, and relate to them on a more personal level.

The model I use is comprised of four components that can be boosted to strengthen your F-EQ:

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness
- relationship management.

Self-awareness

The ancient Greek aphorism “Know thyself” is at the heart of self-awareness. It's knowing what you're made of—your strengths, weaknesses, hot buttons and triggers, limitations, values, and so on. In addition, self-awareness

includes recognizing how you're feeling in the moment.

As a musician, it is imperative that I remain self-aware. Before a show, I check my emotional state so I can take steps to recalibrate if necessary. Once on stage, I stay attuned to how my movements, body language, and energy level are either increasing or decreasing my connection to the audience.

Try to connect with your emotions before, during, and after your sessions. Ask yourself "What does my emotional topography look like right now? Am I in an optimal mind space to be effective?"

Upon arriving, collect your thoughts and visualize a successful event. Then conduct additional checks at breaks, during group work, and after the last participant has left. The checks can be as long or short as time allows. The goal is to stay attuned to your emotions throughout the engagement so that you can perform at your best.

Self-management

Playing gigs frequently puts me in situations that require a high degree of self-management—traffic delays, inebriated audience members, and malfunctioning equipment, for example. When I was younger, I often would allow these negative situations to affect my performance. Since then, I've learned to manage inevitable frustrations more constructively, and apply those lessons to my facilitation.

When feeling stressed, I rely on several tools in my facilitator's toolkit to keep my F-EQ high.

Humor. When participants observe you handling challenges with humor, they become visibly more relaxed. I once spilled a full cup of coffee all over myself. I immediately raised my arms over my head in a gesture of triumph and dramatically shouted "Are you not entertained?" (taken from the movie *Gladiator*). The participants guffawed.

The pause button. Interrupting our natural proclivity to react habitually rather than respond thoughtfully to negative events is integral to successful facilitation. Pressing the pause button enables me to consider the most effective response in the face of difficult conditions.

This could be as simple as stepping away to sip some water, taking a deep breath, or repeating a calming mantra in your head.

Do the opposite. There's a classic *Seinfeld* episode in which George acknowledges that everything he's ever done has been wrong. Jerry suggests doing the opposite. I take that unconventional advice whenever a participant clearly doesn't want to be there.

I had one such individual recently. Rather than ignore her or allow her sighs and pouts to agitate me, I did the opposite—I called on her, challenged her during group discussions, and even requested that she volunteer for a role play (she agreed). Risky? Sure. But afterward, she thanked me for encouraging her to engage and admitted to getting a lot from the session.

Of course, it's important to let truculent participants alone if they are resistant to your conciliatory efforts—which leads us to the next EQ component.

Social awareness

I think of social awareness as the ability to sense what people are feeling, interact and respond empathically, and understand the world through their eyes. Social awareness is crucial to musical performers because it allows them to connect with their audience at a deep level.

High F-EQ facilitators read the room and the emotional state of each participant. While I'm setting up a training event, I note the individuals who are laughing or talking to peers,

quietly texting or reading, or staring off into space or down at the floor.

From these simple observations, I can assess who is happy to be there and who is not. These data help me negotiate potentially tricky emotional terrain early on, giving me clues as to how to establish the right tone, relate to each participant, and recalibrate as the session progresses.

Relationship management

The competencies associated with relationship management include influence, building bonds, teamwork and collaboration, and developing others. As a musician, my success depends on the quality of my relationships with my bandmates and manager, club owners, and fans. My success as a facilitator depends on my relationships with the participants.

The challenge is that I only have a few minutes to develop trust and rapport with a group of strangers. That's where a slightly unusual icebreaker comes in.

For years, I've asked participants the same four questions at the start of my programs: their name, role, number of years at their organization, and first concert. Of course, it's that last one that raises eyebrows and elicits laughs. But that's the point.

The concert question has never failed to create synergy—it demonstrates my interest in the participants beyond their job functions and allows for some entertaining exchanges.

Elevating your F-EQ doesn't require a degree in psychology or a deep understanding of emotional intelligence. Following these recommendations will take your F-EQ to a new level.

■ **Michael Brenner** is president of Right Chord Leadership, a consulting company focused on helping people work in harmony; michael@rightchordleadership.com.



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Prices valid through December 31, 2015. *TD* magazine is published by the Association for Talent Development, formerly ASTD.

071426.31610

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