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## Emotional intelligence helps define success in a different way

The legal profession has long revered those individuals among its ranks who demonstrate high intelligence and strong technical competence; these skills have historically defined achievement. However, in recent years, there has been growing recognition of the critical importance of “emotional intelligence,” or “EQ,” in the short- and long-term professional success of individuals and their organizations.

While being smart and technically proficient at one’s craft is essential, it is no longer enough given the continued evolution of the law and the ever-increasing need for alignment with clients’ business priorities and methodologies. Indeed, it is often these “soft skills” that make the meaningful difference in determining the trajectory of one’s career.

While the concept of emotional intelligence has been around for many years, and certain historians date it as far back as Charles Darwin and his work, it first became mainstream in the mid-1990s with Daniel Goleman’s groundbreaking book, “Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ.” The model that Goleman introduced focuses on a set of skills that drive leadership, performance and success. These constructs include:

1. Self-awareness — understanding yourself and your emotions;
2. Self-management — using emotional awareness to manage oneself in response to various people and situations;
3. Social awareness — the ability to sense, understand and respond to others’ emotions and to comprehend social networks; and
4. Relationship management — the ability to inspire, influence and develop others while managing conflict.

There are various capabilities associated with each of these skills, called “emotional competencies.” While some people may possess them innately, there are many who successfully learn them through training and practice. It is these competencies, along with one’s technical abilities, that engender personal and professional success and fulfillment. Ultimately, the ability to be effective in a way that is both meaningful and relevant drives achievement.

Research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology strongly supports the importance of EQ in professional success. Indeed, it has been found that EQ is just as, if not more important, than one’s IQ. In fact, it accounts for 58 percent of one’s performance across all different types of careers. (Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, “Emotional Intelligence 2.0,” pgs. 20-21 (California: TalentSmart, 2009)). In addition, it has been found that 90

### PARADIGM SHIFT



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percent of high performers have a high EQ, whereas only 20 percent of low performers have a high EQ. Id. at 21. In light of these and similar studies, the legal profession is now focused on identifying, developing and rewarding EQ-based skills in various areas, including talent recruitment, development, management and mentoring, client service, diversity and inclusion, project management, business development and organizational leadership. There are a variety of EQ-based skills that are common threads across each of these dimensions, including effective relationship development, collegiality, team-building, collaboration, strategic partnering, intuition, empathy, humility, compassion, understanding and the ability to influence others.

The common denominators among these traits are self-awareness and effectively developing a meaningful connection with others. The ability to drive powerful relationships with others is a fundamental attribute of high EQ individuals. Essential interpersonal competencies include active listening and discernment, which means effectively understanding and processing information conveyed through both verbal and nonverbal communication. Sometimes the most powerful messages are found in what is not said. Empathy and compassion are also vital attributes; their importance is often underestimated. Empathy is what enables you to truly understand another person’s perspective and to put yourself in their shoes. Compassion is empathy along with the desire that pushes you to act meaningfully. These

qualities help create an environment and dynamic which inspire a level of trust which is fundamental to relationships of all kinds and, especially, with our clients. Ultimately, since we are all human beings with feelings and emotions, we simply cannot remove these elements from the equation. A high EQ individual realizes that true power lies in the ability to constructively and effectively manage and channel human emotion and feeling and that it is just as important as the more traditional, objective benchmarks of high performance.

In practice, high EQ lawyers are also capable of effectively differentiating themselves from their peers by demonstrating a proficiency at wearing several hats within their organization. This is particularly important during challenging economic times when businesses continue to look for ways to streamline their operations and costs. Strong EQ will often translate into more powerful managers and leaders, impressive communication skills, greater resilience, better decision-making abilities, elevated creativity, greater optimism, more self-confidence and higher self-motivation, among other qualities. By consistently honing and practicing these skills, lawyers can be more productive and powerful, both personally and professionally. This benefits them, the organizations for which they work, their clients and their communities.

The latest financial downturn has significantly shifted the ways in which law firms and corporations do business and precipitated the need to do just as much, if not more, with fewer resources and a workforce that is capable of accomplishing just that. Although the economy has shown signs of recovering in recent months, the legal market nevertheless remains highly competitive. In the long run, the most successful professionals will be those who effectively demonstrate that they can be versatile, savvy, nimble and adaptable to ever-changing circumstances, all of which are cornerstones of a high EQ individual.

In the coming months, we will continue to examine the importance of EQ in driving success in the legal profession’s shifting paradigm and what it means to various facets of the profession, including client service, case management, talent management, mentoring, diversity and inclusion. These discussions will serve as an invitation to take a look at ourselves, one another and the organizations with which we work in the context of EQ skills and competencies. They will provide another framework within which to examine and improve our relationships and to be effective change agents within both our professional and personal environments.