

# Emotional Intelligence for Business Growth

First published in *ESKOM NEWS*: March 2002

---

The Effective Training Corporation is of the conviction that emotional intelligence (EQ) is just the leverage South Africa needs to boost growth in the economy. Stephanie Vermeulen - business owner and author of *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone* – says “Raising levels of emotional intelligence in business holds real hope for moving South Africa forward.”

---

From Daniel Goleman’s initial work *Emotional Intelligence*, we know EQ is a far greater predictor of personal success than it’s poor cousin IQ or level of education. Says Vermeulen “So if it works profoundly for the individual, the cumulative effect of raising staff’s EQ is worth contemplating.”

Goleman’s research shows that education alone does not guarantee success in adult life. Moreover the ability to achieve is a reward for having learnt high levels of emotional and social skills. This means being able to control one’s own attitude and having sufficiently well developed interpersonal skills to win other people’s co-operation. According to Vermeulen these two factors are a far more important starting point for South Africa than formal adult education.

“World-over,” she says “thousands of people have achieved much without the privilege of academia. Sure we must address basics like literacy and numeracy but more importantly we need to put hope back into people’s hearts.” Without it she believes businesses are pouring money into a bottomless pit of skills training.

”The ability to learn is rooted in how capable we feel and because apartheid was so disempowering, millions of people struggle with the confidence it takes to acquire complex new skills. It’s not a case of deficiency in talent but more a lack of belief in one’s own ability to succeed.”

Vermeulen is of the school that attitude drives behaviour and even when skills are taught she questions how effectively these can be applied. She claims that skills only cover the tip of the iceberg but deep-seated attitudes determine success or failure in life. “Our outlook governs our level of drive and no amount of skills training can generate the energy it takes to overcome challenges and succeed. Universities and Technikons may produce managers or technically adept people but only experience exposes our natural talent for the subject. This flair is what makes the difference.”

In her years of training experience she has seen far fewer problems with people who were previously disadvantaged and claims to have witnessed higher levels of resourcefulness here. "Generally I find white-collar workers to be very complacent. They're far more likely to waste time complaining and avoiding responsibility." Vermeulen believes overcoming this is one of the biggest challenges facing management because if staff members are not constantly developing, then business growth stagnates.

With South Africa having joined the more competitive global economy, meeting changing demand requires high levels of resourcefulness. She believes this creative energy is released if staff derive personal satisfaction from the contribution they're making. "In the States it's thought that 80% of people don't like their jobs and - although no statistics exist for South Africa - just listening to people tells me we're probably in much the same boat." If money is the only reason people are working, Vermeulen suggests it's unrealistic to expect high levels of motivation.

She claims motivation can only come from within. It's an issue determined by levels of EQ and it's driven by having a clear personal vision. "Essentially we're only motivated for two reasons. Either we're excited about achieving what we want or we wish to move away from an unsatisfactory situation. In South Africa lots of people are disgruntled with their lot and are therefore motivated by the weaker second option." Even the country as a whole she believes is stuck in this phenomenon.

While healing past wounds was essential for a successful future, Vermeulen believes South Africa now needs a national vision - a strong mission which when fulfilled will benefit everyone. "If sport is powerful in uniting the nation, a common goal is vital to people pulling together in the same direction." Although the phrase *African Renaissance* is bandied about, she believes what's needed is a personal transformation of attitudes.

With many companies going through re-engineering and regular retrenchments, Vermeulen believes that South Africa will only transform if its people are more robust. "Change produces chaos which leads to opportunity. In today's environment only the emotionally robust will successfully benefit from these new challenges. Everyday even the well qualified are being put out of their jobs. Now it's more a matter of what we can do or produce because for sure our theoretical education guarantees nothing."

Retrenchments she sees as a worldwide trend towards greater personal independence. "As soon as local people stop viewing themselves as victims of these global circumstances then the country can move forward." She believes that companies who prepare their people prior to retrenchment are making a terrific contribution to the nation.

“What’s needed is more than entrepreneurial skills. Staff facing unemployment are immobilised by personal insecurity and unless they’re prepared emotionally, skills training largely falls on deaf ears. The robust will always find a way to earn and be productive and - with many people being forced into the SME sector - responsible preparation of those who are retrenched will bode well for our economic future.”

In her work Vermeulen sees a strong commitment to making this country great. She believes the will exists but some of our old bad habits need addressing. One such practise is deferring important decisions ‘to wait and see what happens’. Claiming that many local companies have been operating according to this principle since the mid-seventies, she doesn’t find it surprising that the economy is not yet flourishing.

“We’ve created a situation where our businesses are moving as fast as rush-hour traffic. We stop, go, stop, go and wonder why we’re not getting anywhere.” High risk is the nature of business today and, having faced uncertainty for so long, she is of the firm opinion that South Africans are better equipped to deal with change than companies in more stable economies. “Now we just need to get on with it!” she says.

Wisdom teaches that the more experiences people have had the better equipped they are for success. Contained in South Africa’s complex history are many valuable lessons and this knowledge is powerful enough to create a prosperous future.

“The long years of isolation forced innovation but now it seems global acceptance has made us complacent. Instead of being proud of the challenges we’ve overcome we’re still suffering from the ‘second-best’ syndrome.”

She warns as long as enterprises keep judging themselves inferior to those in the US or Europe, the potential for local creativity will be suppressed by these negative sentiments. “Daily we see how enterprising local people are. Whether this is hawking goods, inventing new products or launching empires, all reflect what we’re really capable of. This energetic drive lives in every one of us and only a healthy EQ can unleash it. For our future, tapping this potential is the most intelligent thing we can do.”

She believes issues such as these must be addressed at management level. In her experience many managers are well read but they have not yet integrated the intellectual concepts into their behaviour.

“Staff continually have a problem with managers who talk participation but fail to put it into practise.” For Vermeulen this is the core of EQ. “It’s one thing to understand the literature but it takes a high level of emotional control to change one’s behaviour.”

This is precisely where Vermeulen's book - *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone* - provides assistance. It is one of the few works on the subject that deals with EQ in a practical manner. For the emotionally illiterate, she is also the first writer to decode feelings and provides an emotional dictionary to understand the literal messages of emotions. It can assist managers to understand more about their own behaviour and change their approach to gain more co-operation.

Disturbed by the high levels of negative attitudes in South Africa, Vermeulen initiated the country's first *National Be Positive Day* in November 2001. She believes that the overwhelming negativity is the primary factor driving poor economic performance. This is reflected in the weak currency.

Be Positive is an annual event aimed at jolting South Africans out of the bad habit of whining. "Complaining changes nothing, it just drains our energy. If we are going to address the problems in this country we need to be motivated by the miracle of the country's transition."

Vermeulen runs The Effective Training Corporation and for the past five years has been successfully conducting practical business training courses to increase emotional intelligence. She has developed specific programmes that work with all levels of staff from factory workers to senior management. Her training uses adult-learning principles that are experiential.

---

Stephanie Vermeulen of *The Effective Training Corporation* runs practical training programmes on Applied EQ in business and public forums as well as being an inspiring conference speaker and personal coach.

Her books, *Stitched-up: Who Fashions Women's Lives?* and *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone* are available from all leading bookstores and online from Amazon and Kalahari. She can be contacted on:

Phone: +27 11 486 1211  
e-mail: [steph@theeqsite.co.za](mailto:steph@theeqsite.co.za)  
website: [www.theeqsite.co.za](http://www.theeqsite.co.za)