

Rambo Is Dead. Long Live Masculinity.

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Scientific reasoning aside, it's now well known that female spiders devour their mates to stop the snoring before it even starts. This strange sexual ritual is symbolic of the way women are gobbling up the roles traditionally assigned to men. So where does this leave today's Millennium Man? The one who was raised believing that, traditionally, the male 'scorecard' should look something like this: get to the top; makes pots of money; drink beer; be a sexual dynamo; pee on trees; play sport; watch sport; argue about sport; *bliksem* anyone who gets in the way.

For men these traditional values seemed to make life easy. They provided a clearly defined scorecard used to notch up points for masculinity. For generations this was how men were conditioned to 'measure' their maleness, but things have changed. Now the nerdy 50 kg weakling is kicking sand in the face of yesterday's macho man. So if Rambo is dead, how do we breathe new life into masculinity?

In her book *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone*, Stephanie Vermeulen confronts the issue and we went searching for answers to the modern man's most pressing questions.

Q: Many people joke about the old scorecard but has it really served men?

EQ: More and more men are finding these traditional views of masculinity demeaning. Many believe these roles to be superficial and dismissive because they don't recognize men's deep thinking side. As a form of conditioning these values have been imposed on boys through false promises, which betray men today. For example: fight for your country, the cause is just. (From whose point of view?) Be loyal to the corporation (but we will retrench you). Be aggressive on the sports field and the boardroom (but respond with empathy in all other areas). Understand your wife's disinterest in you (but going elsewhere to get your needs met is not okay.) These and many other contradictions have caused men to start questioning themselves.

But unfortunately there aren't any easy answers. So for some the frustration has manifested as misplaced acts of 'masculinity'. Road rage, misogyny and workaholism are just a few examples. For others the discomfort has fuelled an active search for what it now means to be masculine.

Q: For most men 'emotional intelligence' sounds like a contradiction in terms. So what can EQ do for men?

EQ: Men view EQ like they view 'military intelligence'. Seen as an oxymoron it's impossible to imagine being intelligent when one is emotional. But EQ simply means getting your own way. It's how we go about it that makes all the difference. It's got nothing to do with 'touchy-feely' stuff nor is it about being 'nice'. Also it doesn't offer a new blueprint for the 'right' way to behave. Instead, the intelligence contained in our emotions is the catalyst driving change. Here feeling uncomfortable is a clear sign that something is wrong. Mostly it's saying you're not following what you want. You're not being true to yourself.

Q: For many men, feelings just get in the way of rational thinking. So how can you expect men to start becoming emotional?

EQ: Mostly this is a problem of perception. Emotions provide feedback. They are internal messages that speak to us about what we want. For example, anger is a clear message that we're not getting our way. Today many men are angry about being raised with the old scorecard to measure themselves against. They find the expectations that come with it compromise what they personally want. So, instead of lashing out in a brawl, emotionally robust men have learnt to examine what is making them uncomfortable. Take time with each issue. The intelligence needed to solve the problem lies within the discomfort itself. Don't settle for glib answers - particularly those that blame someone else. This won't teach you anything helpful. The issue is about you and you'll only feel better when you shift your attitude or change your behaviour. Strive for a scorecard more personally suited to you.

Q: But surely many will say that the traditional scorecard does fulfil what men want. Isn't it just society that won't allow men to behave this way anymore?

EQ: Even though the bar-hunt and beer-run appeals to the macho in men, research now shows that most men don't want this as a way of life. Those who live in bars report it to be lonely. It also doesn't mean that men need to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Many find elements of the old scorecard that still work for them, but question and experiment beyond it. Remember change is a slow process. So take it one step at a time.

Q: It's surprising how many men today are asking questions about balancing work and family. Why is this so?

EQ: Men need to be needed more than women. They measure their worth by the number of people who need them. But with female breadwinners and sperm-banks, men are asking the question 'Needed for what?' So although men are questioning the balance in their lives, I suspect the more important issue today is: Where do I fit in? To find out men must first get to know more about who they are beyond their traditional roles. Many realise that work isn't everything. Family and key relationships help them to define a new fit in life.

Q: **Do men really want to be involved in the family? Or is it just expected of us?**

EQ: With women often bringing home the bacon and managing the family, many men feel alienated and lonely at home. And they feel guilty, but it's not enough to motivate them to really muck-in. Guilt is never a powerful force for change. It's just a fake emotion hiding resentment. So if guilt makes men compromise what they want, predictably their resentment will build. Women often use guilt to manipulate. Things like 'You should be home more.' or 'You ought to give the kids more attention' are typical. For men, complying with 'shoulds' won't help them address why they don't want to. It just builds their resentment. So instead of feeling guilty, look into the deeper issues and start working on these. Examine the areas where you do want to get more involved and quietly start doing so.

Q: **With all these changes in roles, what is expected of men?**

EQ: Women want more than 'man-ual' labour from men. But it differs from person to person. To find out men can ask their spouse to write a letter stating what she is getting as a partner. Many husbands have been surprised by the reality of what it's like to be married to them. The letter format forces her to think instead of just rambling on. Do the same for her and then openly talk about each other's needs and wants. Even if this leads to an argument, conflict may be necessary to open up honest discussion. What it will require is both partners being prepared to listen. A good partnership always requires a well-negotiated settlement.

Q: Why does marriage become so boring?

EQ: This issue is more than men just needing variety to spice up their lives. It's about a perception of marriage that forbids everything on the traditional scorecard. Monogamy replaces the excitement of chasing skirt, dinner at home supersedes jolling and instead of enjoying the rugby, men are expected to go shopping. It's understandable many men think - even if its subconscious - that marriage makes them lose their masculinity. So it's no wonder that men perceive marriage to be dull. This is especially true in traditional marriage where the wife stays at home. As her role is based on playing mum, women often start acting like her husband's mother. Where this is the case, it's difficult for him to get into bed and want to screw his mummy. It's why men often have affairs with liberated women. They find them sexier. Considering the male need for dominance, it means the challenge is always there.

Q: So why do so many men get married?

EQ: In reality men need marriage more than women. Married men achieve more and are emotionally better off than their single friends. A recent statistic shows that the death rate is four times higher for divorced men. This highlights the dangers of the old 'scorecard' as a lonely and disconnected existence. Marriage can become a supportive friendship. Once men get beyond the stereotype, it need not be an unappealing ball and chain.

Q: Do men need to be more in touch with their feminine side?

EQ: Many men don't even believe they have a feminine side. They can find balance by getting in touch with their humanness. This caters for a man's individuality. Just as women now have unlimited choices about whom they can become, so too do men. Most men only come to this conclusion after many years of the macho game, once they see the emptiness of the role. This is the time for men to start re-creating themselves. Those who do, find life more satisfying. Sadly, older men who've stuck with the role, regret things like not having been more involved with their children. Neither their wealth nor status makes up for this.

Q: How do men cope with their wives earning more than they do?

EQ: It's not true that all men want the responsibility of the sole breadwinner. Certainly today where working mothers have raised many younger men, this is not an issue. However, those raised by traditional parents have great difficulty here. As money and power are linked, men who earn less believe they are losing their power. Often this sends them scuttling straight back into the old scorecard.

But men with a healthy EQ understand that money is linked to personal power and personal power is about energy. Powerful people like Nelson Mandela may not have great personal wealth, but they have loads of energy. So it's not about defining oneself by external factors like status, cars and houses. It comes from being more secure within.

Q: With men working alongside women, how do men manage emotional female colleagues?

EQ: It's a myth that women are more prone to emotional outbursts than men. Women are conditioned to be more in touch with their feelings, but this means that women are more emotionally rugged than men. If you look at incidences of violence like road rage, murder, spousal and child abuse, the perpetrators are more likely to be men. On the surface, men may appear to be in control. But these outbursts show that instead of dealing with issues they just bottle them up. So as the feelings-turf is largely unknown, emotional females are scary to deal with. The more men make friends with their own emotions, the more familiar the feelings-turf becomes.

Q: Why do men find it so hard to get in touch with their feelings?

EQ: Men who were raised traditionally were not just taught that cowboys don't cry. Young boys are made to feel ashamed about the emotions they express. So when women talk about getting in touch, men don't know what they're on about. But shame was imposed upon men; it's not a natural part of the male psyche. By working at it a step at a time men can and do get past it.

Q: Is there a process men can follow?

EQ: Overcoming the shame and connecting with real feelings involves a four stage process:

- 1) Understand the shame. It doesn't help to deny it.
- 2) Try and label the feelings behind it and own them.
- 3) Using the emotional dictionary provided in my book, rationally understand the message of these feelings. The feeling itself will suggest the changes needed.
- 4) Make the shifts and start adapting slowly to the new more individualistic you. As it's not part of your existing habit, it will feel strange at first.

Q: Men are unlikely to change because women demand it of them. So what will the catalyst be now?

EQ: Typically men have needed a frontier to challenge them. This pioneering spirit fitted the traditional view. However, with no obvious frontier, many men now believe they are being robbed of their masculinity. With women's liberation re-defining roles, females have broadened their skills. Men on the other hand have retreated. This is unhealthy. Instead, men could benefit from viewing their new-you masculinity as the next frontier. They can define their goals differently, re-negotiate their relationships, start really connecting with their kids or re-evaluate their marriage. But whatever each individual decides, by doing so men can slowly develop a personalised scorecard that meets their needs. Better than beer and bars, it is this that will make men strong, robust, healthy and... yes... masculine in future.

Stephanie Vermeulen of *The Effective Training Corporation* runs practical emotional intelligence programmes for all levels in business.

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:

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