



Managing with emotional intelligence abroad

As a manager abroad, you have an important – and challenging – role of managing people that belong to a different culture than your own and potentially a whole multicultural team. Additionally, you are challenged by living in a different country with different communication styles and ways of expressing emotions than your own. You may also be just starting to learn the local language of your host country. Managing a team as an expat requires you to wear many hats and hone your emotional intelligence (EQ) in order to be successful.

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence refers to a range of skills that relate to one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It is usually broken down into the following areas:

- **Perceiving emotions.** This is the ability to read and understand the emotions of other people as well as your own.
- **Using emotions.** This means using your awareness of emotions for productive decision making and action. Emotions are there for a reason and learning to listen to them can help with problem solving and decision making.
- **Understanding the source of emotions.** This means you understand that there are lots of underlying causes of emotions, and they aren't necessarily obvious. For example, if someone appears rude to you, and you're tapped into this aspect of EQ, you're able to acknowledge that it may not have anything to do with you; they could be having a bad day. Managing in your host country the communication style may be very different and difficult to interpret. By looking beyond your own cultural interpretations and recognizing that emotional expression can come from different sources and meanings will help you succeed as an expat manager.

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- **Managing emotions.** Emotions are a part of every person's life, and the ability to integrate them is important to maintaining emotional health. Managing emotions means not allowing them to overwhelm you, while staying attentive to what they are trying to say, and eventually dealing with what is causing them.

Reading this, you can probably begin to get an idea of why EQ is so important for managers. Managing is as much about being conscious of your employees' personal and interpersonal well-being as it is about taking care of organizational tasks and structures. Being compassionate and empathic goes a long way to help a team and an organization to run smoothly.

Thankfully, EQ is something that it is very possible to improve and strengthen. Here are some ways to become more aware of your team's emotional well-being:

- Be aware of your own preconceived notions and communication style; what works at home may not work in your new environment.
- Track your own feelings, especially negative ones. Becoming more aware of your emotions will strengthen your ability to manage them. For example, if you are feeling overly stressed or frustrated, it is important not to take this out on your team, and increased emotional awareness will greatly reduce the likelihood of this and problem solve.
- Demonstrate empathy: even if you don't feel the same way as someone else, you have probably experienced a similar emotional state, use this experience to try to understand where they're coming from, even if you don't agree.
- Thank your team for their hard work and acknowledge their strengths and successes.
- Get outside help: talking with a mentor, life coach or counsellor, and fellow expats can greatly increase your ability to perceive and manage your emotions.

Remember, emotional intelligence is never about suppressing or ignoring emotions, but in fact about integrating them gracefully into all that you do. This means it's integral to successful leadership to learn to understand and express your emotions constructively. When abroad, or in any leadership position, if you show respect, abandon preconceived notions and choose your communication styles wisely, you'll be able to effectively manage and contribute to a high-functioning workforce.

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