

President's Message

Testing for Emotional Intelligence in Policing: The dangers inherent in skimming the surface of EI.

Without doubt, emotional intelligence (EI) is important to policing. We are now at a stage where EI is becoming a fundamental part of policing training. But before we pat ourselves on the back with too much enthusiasm, we should pause for a moment of reflection. Greg and I have become quite concerned with this new *Golem* that we are about to create.

As you know, we predicted that the policing profession would attempt to *quantify* PBL and institute a 'means test' (for lack of a better term) for Emotional Intelligence. We have been anticipating this since I gave my first speech on the topic of pre-hire testing to Chief Norm Stamper and his Seattle folks in **1998**. Greg has also resisted such testing since the 1990s when he was teaching the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) at their academy.

Discussions concerning EI and the testing of applicants prior to hiring have intensified. I agree with the concept generally, but we need to recognize the great danger inherent in using EI as a written entry test for applicants aspiring to a police career.

For example: imagine if we stop – as those saving time or money inevitably will – at the testing stage and we don't bother to hire the less brilliant test-takers or engage in the "teaching" aspect of an EI program? We can always tell ourselves, "*our agency saved time by testing our people and only hired the best "Elers"*". You've all been in policing long enough to know that is exactly what will happen in far too many agencies. By quantifying the technology of testing, we'll forgo what we are truly trying to achieve: namely emotional intelligence training and interpersonal competence. I predict that the test, and not the end product, will become the focus of Police EI if we travel that route.

In his warnings on giving over too much authority to technology, Neil Postman writes that submitting to the instruments of learning (computers, tests, etc) creates a culture that genuflects at the altar of what he calls "technopoly." He writes that effective gathering and rapid dispersal of information, "finds its satisfactions in technology and takes its orders from technology." Let's hope we in policing education remember the purpose of EI is to learn it, not to test it.

Hiring and Firing for EI

Clearly, we have to be very careful with testing EI for the purposes of hiring or firing. The best indicator of future EI expression is previous EI expression. If we are serious about intra and interpersonal skills, then during the vetting process we should visit former teachers, professors, family, friends, "girlfriends/boyfriends and colleagues. We should ask *those* individuals EI questions concerning our candidates. We may also decide to have 'front end' prep courses to watch the candidates interact in a classroom or community dynamic. Testing someone for emotional intelligence - on a paper test - risks a serious lack of accuracy in determining EI abilities in our recruits. Such tests are equally likely to expose egocentricity and creative writing skills rather than highlighting positive EI traits.

The only route to changing one's personal EI is to expose the individual to his or her own EI patterns and teach a change process extensively rather than revert or regress to teaching the constituent elements of EI incidentally and randomly.

What policing needs is better instructors who know how to teach interpersonal dynamics and incorporate EI training throughout the curriculum. The profession needs well-monitored adult learning environments, not better tests to reward the 'good' Elers or reject the 'bad' Elers.

An example: To Print or not to Print?

I want to test my grade 1s for printing skills before they enter my class. If they don't measure up, I don't let them in. This method has the advantage of being strong on economics and time saving. It

suffers as a strategy however when we consider that printing is a learned skill and many, if not most of those who learn the skill in grade 1 go on to become excellent printers later in life. Admission without testing also alleviates the concern of those, like me, with underdeveloped dexterity. Similarly, EI training is skills-based and it can – as in the printing example above or with recruits coming into an academy - be learned through habituation and constant practice.

E.I is too difficult and time consuming to teach at the academy. We should just hire those who come to us with ‘good EI.’

I have a better idea! Let’s pass a law that shelters our students from difficult topics. We should prohibit the reading of history or psychology or detailed texts on evidence law for that matter. These texts will just confuse students with anachronistic language and complex themes. Instead, we should provide the 2-page shrink-lit version, or the “Cliff” notes, or the PowerPoint lecture on evidence law and test them on those ‘lightened’ texts.

Some individuals would suggest we should consider this easier option because those texts and presentations would be clearer and our students should grasp the material more quickly. However, expertise is gained over a *lifetime* of study and practice: whether it be homicide investigation, education methodologies, or learning how to disagree without being disagreeable.

Yet, given the “*let’s get ‘er done*” mentality that evolves out of the random patrol, rapid response, post-crime investigation policing model that we have established in the last fifty years, we just can’t help ourselves—like ducks to water—from racing forward to compress our responses, systemize our learning and deflate the depth of understanding of various topics.

I fear we will reduce to ridiculous simplicity (ie an entrance test) should remain complex, difficult and challenging, and we will do so in praise of the gods of convenience and so-called *common sense*. I think you will agree with me that EI and PBL are *classic* examples of how we are becoming policing fundamentalists all over again! We criticized FTO and rote learning, but are we now walking that same path?

I think individuals who have taken an EI program or an engaged in a PBL course can appreciate why Greg and I insist that the PBL learning process needs to be carried out over an extended period of time. The course has months of front-end loading via the pre-course assignment. It requires extended email introductions, 2-weeks of on-site lessons and 3 attempts at group work. Students must also commit time to evening movies and EI exercises every morning. This level of engagement with EI should be the minimum in terms of how long we spend on this important topic with our newest employees.

We have resisted ‘shrinking’ our approach to the PBL course and we encourage all of our students to defend against the minimalists in our midst. Yet, look what is happening to PTO and PBL in. Some police agencies and State and Provincial governing bodies want to offer the ‘shrink lit’ version because it is economically viable. Putting a bandage on a severed artery is much more cost effective, but it will not have much impact on changing the limited mortality prospects of the victim.

We are NOT thinking clearly when we cheat our students out of in-depth consideration of topics for the sake of expediency. We tell our own children that hard work pays off, **yet we in policing always seem to want to take the fastest and easiest approach to whatever challenge faces us.** For that flaw, I blame the ‘calls for service’ demons that haunt police psyches.

Instead of saying, “too many calls” like we hear from our street officers, we in administration and in training say *too little time or too little money*. It’s the same song with a different chorus. When I became a school administrator I went on an executive training course for eight weeks. After a year, I went on another one for another eight weeks. That extended period of time simply got me started. *My learning had begun.*

Both of those trainings were at the local university and they were required—with extensive reading and study—to become an education leader. This was beyond the “basic training” of the Bachelor of Education. Police training must demand the same level of expertise from its practitioners, especially

those standing in front of classrooms. The issue of “time” is at best an illusion and, at worst, a willful misdirection by those interested in commerce, not healthy communities.

What truly matters in terms of time spent training rookies or up-skilling experienced officers is how well those officers perform in their communities. The issue for those of us in education is simply to support and develop appropriate responses from our employees. When we take the time to do our training properly, our investment as police leaders is ALWAYS worth the effort.

I hope you will impress this upon your students. *As future leaders of this movement, others will require your leadership so they too will resist the cycle of “getting the training done”, and doing so in record time.* We want to make sure that PBL in policing remains in ‘good hands’. This discussion and your commitment and resolve to mentor others are essential for that transition.

Good luck and I’m looking forward to exploring the ‘big picture’ with you in Seattle.

Regards to everyone.

Gerard Cleveland
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