

Four essential EQ competencies for educational leaders  
“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming you, you are a better person than I am, *Gunga Din*” –Rudyard Kipling

Holly Elissa Bruno, MA, JD [hollyelissabruno.com](http://hollyelissabruno.com) [hollyelissab@comcast.net](mailto:hollyelissab@comcast.net)  
BAMradionetwork.com *Heart to heart conversations on leadership: Your guide to making a difference.*

Remember when you 1<sup>st</sup> heard of Howard Gardner’s “Multiple intelligences”? Most of us saw the immediate application of social and emotional intelligence to young children’s development. Only years later are we paying attention to EQ for adults, thanks to Drs. Daniel Goleman and Peter Salovey. Times have changed since intelligence was defined as “intellect untainted by emotion.”

According to research reported in *Harvard Business Review*, our most successful leaders are skilled managers of people who inspire employees to greatness. Eighty percent of crucial life decisions require emotional intelligence (the ability to read people as well as we read books). What competencies do we need to keep everyone’s eyes on the prize especially when those around us are losing their cool and blaming us?

### **EMOTIONAL LITERACY: How can I read my own emotions?**

**Our feelings are our free and endless source of data.** Although we are usually too busy to pay attention to them, we cannot hide our emotions from others. Our **mirror neurons** absorb and imitate the feelings of people nearby. If we are discouraged, others pick that up. According to the Institute for Heart Math, our heart beat communicates “Welcome!” or “Back off” to people within 5 feet. Although we cannot stop our emotions from communicating, we can choose to pay attention to these indicators of emotions:

**FEAR** Shallow breathing, throat tightness, racing heart, pressure to run away or fight.  
**ANGER** Heat in the face, adrenalin surge, clenched fists, shoulders braced for a fight  
**GUILT** Looking down or away, feeling “smaller” inside, crumpled body  
**SHAME** Intense pressure to wilt into nothing, beat ourselves up, crushed heart  
**JOY** Light hearted, head up, “walking tall”, bubbling energy, open to embrace  
**SADNESS** Lump in throat, “misting” eyes, tightness in chest, aching heart

**Reading these indicators provides data on how to work with feelings to remain professional:** If **afraid**, scan for threats and protect yourself. If **angry**, step back, relax your shoulders, breathe more slowly. If **guilty**, admit your mistake, apologize, move on.. If **ashamed**, acknowledge at least one of your strengths. When **sad**, commit to take time to grieve **Ask:** are these my feelings or am I picking up feelings of people nearby?

### **MANAGING MY AMYGDALA: What if I want to scream, cry or punch someone?**

**The amygdala, a small gland in the middle of our head, continuously scans for threats.** Without a thought, the amygdala signals our systems to spurt adrenalin or cortisol through our veins. The resulting “**amygdala hijack**” pushes us off balance,

unable to “think straight”. The flight, fight or “tend and befriend” response takes over. We feel “beside ourselves”/“lose our heads”, a professional shambles like anyone else.

**Distancing is the EQ competency we need in an amygdala hijack.** Perspective heals destructive brain pathways. Picture yourself stepping aside or climbing up on a balcony. With a dollop of patience, that mature part of our brain, the “**executive function**” of our **pre-frontal cortex** will calm us. Breathe in and out. Our hearts will continue to pound for a bit; however, our quieter, wiser voice within can begin to speak to us. Listen up!

**DECISION MAKING: Can I free myself of 2<sup>nd</sup> guessing or decisions I will regret?**

**Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Blink*, encourages us to trust our gut reaction.** He calls the brain a “Giant computer that quickly and quietly processes a lot of the data we need in order to keep functioning as human beings”. Studies show women more than men “second guess” or ruminate over our own decisions. Call upon this competency instead:

When you have a decision to make, **write quickly what you would decide if you had to take immediate action.** Save that and walk away. **Sleep on** your decision. The next morning, read your decision. You are likely to see the wisdom in your choice. Take action. Move on. Perfection is the enemy of the good. Allow yourself to make “good enough” decisions. Keep perspective by asking yourself: “**How important is it?**”

**If you must make a decision under pressure,** step up to the balcony. Breathe. Call upon that “silent guardian that protects us” within where your inner wisdom resides. Listen.

**HEALING POWER OF HUMOR: How can I take myself less seriously?**

Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. According to Dr. Stuart Brown, author of *Play*, we become our most powerful selves through laughter, humor and play: “**Play is the brain’s jungle gym.**” Teams that play together resolve problems. Play develops our pre-frontal cortex, our professional, confident and optimistic self.

I asked colleague Luis Hernandez, guest on *Heart to heart conversations on leadership: Your guide to making a difference* (BAMradionetwork.com or hollyelissabruno.com) “When is humor appropriate for a leader to use and when not?” Luis responded: “**Laughing at oneself is always appropriate**”. In short, we need to “get over ourselves”.

Employees’ mirror neurons are “wired” to weight your emotional messages more strongly than a peer’s (unless the peer is a bully/gossiper). If you see humor in dire situations and model laughing at yourself, your staff learns how to lighten up.

**Supervising even the most resistant staff member becomes easier when you call upon these four EQ competencies.** Imagine that! How would you apply these competencies to your biggest challenges?