

Emotional Intelligence – A Leadership Essential

"In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels."

— Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ

[An Indian court has convicted Rajesh and Nupur Talwar,](#)

both dentists, of killing Aarushi, their teenage daughter, and a 45-year old Nepali employee in a case that has gripped the country for more than five years. The evidence states that the parents found their daughter and the servant in an 'objectionable' compromising position. Overcome with anger, the murder was committed supposedly with a golf club and a dental scalpel at their home in an affluent New Delhi suburb in May 2008.

Why is this story relevant to **[Emotional Intelligence](#)**? Being emotionally intelligent means to be aware of your emotions to the extent that you can choose how you respond to a situation.



"Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth."- Mayer & Salovey, 1997

Our Amygdala, which is part of our limbic brain, makes us react to situations. This is because our past traumatic memories are housed in our amygdala and we react as if we are in danger when we perceive a threat. All stimuli is taken in through our eyes and sent to our thalamus, which then sends the message to both our amygdala as well as our neo-cortex. The Amygdala checks if there is any danger. If it senses danger, our Amygdala takes over and shuts down the neo-cortex which is responsible for logical thinking.

If the allegations were true, it would seem that the sight of their young daughter with the 45-year-old servant evoked overpowering anger, which led to an amygdala hijack for the Talwars. This prompted them to react in such a gruesome manner. In reactive behaviours there are no winners. In this case, an entire family has been wiped out because of it.

What is the alternative you may ask? The way our brain is wired, the amygdala takes **[6 seconds](#)** to be fully activated. During this time if we ask a question, then the neo-cortex gets activated and the amygdala shuts down. This gives us the ability to choose how we respond to the situation, as our neo-cortex is responsible to logical and rational thinking.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

- Viktor E. Frankl

What differentiates humans from all other creatures of this world is our ability for logical and rational thinking. So when we operate from our amygdala we are operating from the level of animals. The only thing we see is the immediate situation at hand with only one solution – we are unable to see all the other options that exist.

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As leaders we play critical roles during Crisis, Conflict and Change. In all three situations the amygdala is hijacked as there is an element of danger. During these times it is imperative for the leader to stay calm and lead the troops to safety by choosing from the various available options. In order for this to happen, leaders have to operate from the neo-cortex, the rational part of the brain. Hence in our [leadership training programs](#) we teach a unique technique that helps you to be more present in the moment and make a choice from the plethora of options that are available in every crisis.

Author Bio:

Pramila Mathew specializes in Management Coaching and Leadership Development. With over 25 years of experience in the global workspace, she is one of the few Training Consultants with a background in business and psychology. She heads MMM Training Solutions, a soft skills training consultancy that focuses on training and development and business coaching as the catalyst of enhancing performance management.

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