

# Are you smart enough?

Why an emotionally intelligent leader is necessary

*by Donna L. Minter*

**A**s a pediatric neuropsychologist, my clinical work sometimes requires me to give very sad news to parents. Telling parents that their child's intellectual weaknesses will likely not allow her to function as an independent adult is never an easy task.

# EI AS A CORE COMPETENCY

Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA identify six core competencies for ministerial leadership including emotional intelligence. These are described as follows:<sup>1</sup>

## Competency

- Self-awareness and emotional health

## Knowledge

- Self-understanding
- Calling and gifts
- Values
- Boundaries
- Healthy relationships
- Crisis intervention
- Emotional intelligence

## Skills/Practices

- Self-reflection with accountability
- Stress and boundary management
- Conflict management
- Enters into and maintains healthy relationships
- Lifelong learning
- Whole person self-care
- Appropriate emotional expression

## Formation Content

- Learnings about self
- Family systems theory
- Conflict mediation
- Pastoral ethics
- Personality, leadership, and psychological assessment tools
- Relationship skills training
- Creative and physical activities

## Delivery Systems

- Clinical pastoral education
- Psychological therapy
- Pastoral ethics and ministry formation classes
- Mentor relationships
- Peer accountability groups
- Growth plans
- Continuing education events
- Artistic and physical events

## Outcomes in Congregation

- Healthy relationships
- Welcomes and incorporates a variety of people
- Engages conflict and differences productively
- Engages the gifts of all
- Encourages diverse expressions of faith reflecting the whole person

When faced with this situation, I commonly find that, while a child may not be mentally intelligent, she has a natural capacity to warmly connect with others. She lights up the room wherever she goes! Her IQ is very low compared to other kiddos her age, yet she can recognize and genuinely express emotions, empathize warmly, and develop caring relationships with others. In these tense moments, I share with distraught parents: “We all know really smart people who are not fun to be around. They have intellectual smarts but not emotional smarts. Your child, while she has intellectual limitations, has high emotional intelligence. She will never be without friends and warm relationships. She will be successful because she knows how to connect with others in meaningful, loving ways.” Tearfully, parents typically reply, “We didn’t want to hear it, but we suspected that our child has intellectual limitations. But what we are pleasantly surprised to learn is that she can have a happy, meaningful life. We never recognized her warm, fun personality as a kind of intelligence. Thank you for helping us see this strength in her. It means the world to us.”

“I have learned the importance of recognizing emotional intelligence in my patients.”

After 20 years of clinical work, I have learned the importance of recognizing emotional intelligence in my patients, of seeing Jesus in them. It has also taught me to strengthen my own emotional intelligence so I can follow Jesus better by valuing all relationships with those in my sphere of influence. It is essential to foster self-awareness, identify feelings, practice the best ways to express emotions, recognize the verbal and nonverbal emotions of others, listen to and connect with them empathetically, and discover ways to balance human strengths with frailty. When I do this, I maximize the win-win potential in both my professional and personal relationships. With emotional intelligence skills, I am better able to, as Anabaptist theologian Palmer Becker so aptly put it, “keep Jesus as the center of my faith, community as the center of my life, and reconciliation as the center of my work.”

1. <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/ministerial-credentialing-competencies-and-education/>.

So, how does emotional intelligence relate to being a congregational leader? Around the fourth century CE, Augustine of Hippo wrote that pastors have the following job responsibilities:

Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved. (Sermon CCIX)

It's that simple, and it's that complicated.

As congregational leaders, sharing Jesus leads us into all aspects of people's personal lives. When we listen to, talk with, and pray for people, the deeper, unresolved parts of their lives inevitably surface. So how can our faith communities be safe places where people can reflect upon and acknowledge their emotional and spiritual brokenness, seek guidance, support, and healing, and celebrate their progress toward becoming the people God created them to be? It is imperative that a pastor possess a high level of self-awareness, emotional insight, interpersonal connectedness, and conflict transformation skills combined with spiritual maturity and wisdom.

**“As congregational leaders, sharing Jesus leads us into all aspects of people's personal lives.”**

I informally surveyed several pastors and learned that when they attended seminary, they learned how to craft a sermon, teach a Bible study, and plan worship. Some took a class in pastoral care and others took clinical pastoral education training. However, it's unlikely that most congregational leaders get specific training in maximizing their emotional intelligence for the benefit of themselves and others within their care.

### Developing one's emotional intelligence

In 1995, building on the 1990 work of Peter Salovey from Yale University and John Mayer from

the University of New Hampshire, psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman wrote the book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Within 10 years, the concept of emotional intelligence, or EI, spread across the globe like wildfire. Religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu circles as well as scholars, teachers, business consultants, and managers contacted Goleman with questions, and described how EI was, indeed, relevant to their lives and work with others. According to Goleman, much of sustained career success is due not to IQ but to EI. This form of intelligence allows us to be not just smart, but also perceptive. Much of Christian growth involves the use of emotional wisdom and discernment.

**“This form of intelligence allows us to be not just smart, but also perceptive.”**

Clearly, there is a need in the church for EI education because it speaks to the heart of human relationships, which ultimately is what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were all about. At its roots, EI is the degree to which we can:

1. Recognize, label, and accurately express our emotions that cause us to act.
2. Empathize and identify nonverbal clues to tune into how someone else is feeling.
3. Understand and analyze what creates stress in our own and others' lives.
4. Motivate someone to be their best self and refrain from disruptive, harmful behavior.
5. Authentically listen and speak to others to resolve rather than escalate conflicts.
6. Negotiate win-win solutions for all parties involved.

### Following Jesus' example

Jesus was the master of emotional intelligence. In essence, he was the greatest psychologist who ever lived. He possessed keen insight into human behavior and relationships. He read people's hearts and minds and responded to everyone he met in surprising, amazing ways. With an attentive, listening ear, an ability to interpret nonverbal communication, and a clear awareness of trauma's effects on the human soul, he motivated others to

### WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

- Pastors
- Elders
- Deacons
- Boards of trustees
- Adult Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders
- Pastoral search committees
- Pastor-congregation relations committees

# RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience) teaches emotionally intelligent strategies for entering the small gate and walking the narrow road for spiritual and psychological healing and empowerment toward reconciliation. STAR was developed as a multicultural, multifaith training following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, with a two-million-dollar grant from Church World Service at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP), Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. STAR has a 14-year national and international reputation of successfully training thousands of professionals and laypersons how to address trauma, break cycles of violence, and build resilience to empower their communities toward reconciliation. STAR is laced with emotional intelligence concepts, incorporates biblical principles, and integrates neuropsychology, trauma healing and resilience, restorative justice, nonviolent conflict transformation, and broadly defined spirituality, setting the stage for authentic reconciliation.



Since 2010, the Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute (aka “Peacebuilding,” [www.mnpeace.org](http://www.mnpeace.org)) has offered multiple STAR trainings in Minneapolis-St. Paul. The Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan nonprofit organization teaching tools to transform psychological trauma into nonviolent power. Its mission is to instigate, train, and support racially, sexually, ethnically, culturally, religiously, and economically diverse individuals and organizations to become trauma-informed, resilience-oriented, restorative-focused empowering communities in Minnesota, the United States, and around the world. We envision peacebuilding institutes in every major city in the United States teaching STAR and related peacebuilding trainings to people from diverse backgrounds. For those with less time, Peacebuilding also offers *STAR-Lite Training: Learning Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience in a Single Day* and *Restorative Justice 101: Training for Practice in Everyday Life* throughout the year. We offer optional continuing education credits to mental health professionals, nurses, teachers, clergy, and attorneys for Peacebuilding’s trainings.

STAR is also offered to the general public at CJP at Eastern Mennonite University multiple times per year and internationally. The CJP Summer Peacebuilding Institute offers a broad range of emotional intelligence-related trainings for individual and community peacebuilding.

See [www.peaceaftertrauma.com](http://www.peaceaftertrauma.com) for STAR and related resources available for free.

—Donna L. Minter

#### For further reading:

1. Carolyn Yoder. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005).
2. Daniel Goleman. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2006).

turn their lives around to be their best for God’s kingdom. He transformed conflicts by negotiating relationships that benefited everyone. The Spirit leads us to choose narrow, often tenuous paths to reconciliation, as described in Matthew 7:13-14: “For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

“Jesus was the master of emotional intelligence.”

#### Training congregational leaders

Given the popularity in the past 20 years of the EI concept, it is not surprising that there are now EI curriculums in schools, training for human resource managers, and assessments for corporate executives around the world.

For the past 14 years, the Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR) program has taught emotional intelligence skills and strategies for psychological healing, conflict transformation, and reconciliation both inside and outside the church to over seven thousand individuals worldwide (see sidebar). STAR integrates neuropsychology, trauma healing and resilience, restorative justice, nonviolent conflict transformation, and broadly defined spirituality, setting the stage to practice authentic reconciliation.

When we discover, learn, and practice emotional intelligence, then we more aptly move toward reconciliation—the center of our work—as Jesus calls us to do. Pastors, congregational leaders, and all of us who follow Jesus can find this small gate and walk the narrow road toward spiritual healing and reconciliation with the greatest Psychologist as our emotionally intelligent guide in a world full of desperate need in and outside the church.



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