

# How Construction Leaders Introduce Emotional Intelligence Skills to Their Teams

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Construction leaders, from foremen to engineers to C-Suite executives, often have low empathy, black-and-white thinking, and difficulties with interpersonal relationships, according to Brent Darnell of Brent Darnell International. If you want to read about his findings in Part I of this series, click [here](#). For Part II, The Jobsite spoke with construction leaders who use emotional intelligence (EI) tools in their own work lives and, in turn, introduce these tools to their teams.

Some managers might fear they may be mocked if they introduce concepts of emotional intelligence in the workplace. They might tend to keep this soft-skill work to themselves and see what kind of change they can bring about solely by working on themselves.

Darnell asks leaders who are afraid of this sort of rejection from their teams, “Who are you to withhold this information just because you think they might not embrace it?” After all, everyone on the team will profit. “I’ve done this training down to the foreman level, and at that level, they embraced this work even more than the top management did.”

Brad Phillips, chief marketing officer and CEO of Beck International, says that increasing emotional intelligence pays big dividends at any level of a company. “To have somebody that’s capable of getting a \$100 million project built, they’re pretty typically alpha males, and that can be pretty brutal on the people that are working for them.” A team member may have high assertiveness, and that is a great trait, “but if you don’t have some high empathy? Then that’s not going to work very well.” Darnell’s emotional intelligence assessments describe how balanced emotional traits often matter more than strengths in one area or another.

It’s not that alpha males don’t care about their team, Phillips says. It’s that they may lack awareness of how their behavior makes other people feel. “Most of the guys, they care deeply for the people who work for them, but they’re not showing that.”

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Some members of a team may not be alphas, though. “If you have someone who has high empathy and low assertiveness, many times they become overwhelmed because they are saying yes to everything, Phillips says.“Maybe, they have high social responsibility and are involved in everything, and get overwhelmed.” Phillips coaches people to be a little more assertive in such a case. He tells them, “ ‘Say: Yes, can I do it next week?’ You’re not asking them not to be empathetic and not to be socially responsible, but to be aggressive enough for your own rights to do it in a time manner that works for you.”

Bryan Smith, a regional general superintendent for The Beck Group in Austin,Texas, says he resisted delving into emotional intelligence when he first met Brent Darnell. Nevertheless, once he gained awareness of how his emotions drove his behavior, it changed his life. “The soft-skill thing have some sort of negative connotation. It did for me, and it does for a lot of people. I used to sit back, and Brent would call it the Superintendent Stare: locked arms, hands under the armpits, which is a sign of ‘I don’t want to be here’, a slight tilt to the head, staring at him as if saying, ‘Why am I here and what in the heck are you going to teach me?’”

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But becoming aware of his patterns, he says, led to change. “I’m a heck of a different person.” Just reading the results of his EI test “left something in the background. It is like a little blip on the screen that I kind of measured from... that awareness was vital in really producing some changes in how I conduct my day-to-day business.”

Once Smith found that he could change his interactions through awareness and new behaviors, he wanted to pass these tools to his teams. However, he realized it wouldn’t work if they didn’t see the need themselves. “The best points made are the ones people get for their own.”

He admits that he is still a work-in-progress. “I don’t get it right all the time. There are the times my impulse control gets the better of me, and my assertiveness comes through. It’s like a bull in a china shop, and I have to be aware of that. Sometimes, a little voice goes off that says, ‘Hold up, back off, back off, back off.’ I used to never do that.”

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Darnell says that from top managers to foremen, it’s about bringing your best self to work. “My mission statement is to make the industry more collaborative, more fun.”

When work is more fun, and people have more awareness of how they affect each other, they are able to be more creative.

Philips says, “I wish I would have had this kind of tool back in my thirties when I was making the change from being a manager to a leader. It would have been instrumental for sure.”

To read Brent Darnell’s white papers on Emotional Intelligence, click [here](#).

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