Top 10 Competencies Essential to Excellence on the Job (and in Life)

For more than twenty years Sherry Buffington Ph.D., founder of NaviCore International, Inc and the originator of the CORE system, researched the factors for personal and professional success. At first she asked business leaders what they considered the most important attributes to success on the job and began compiling their answers. As she did, it became apparent that the same competencies that leaders were looking for in employees were the ones essential for success in general, both professionally and personally. To test her hypothesis, she began interviewing successful individuals to determine the attributes they considered most important and most predictive of success. Over the years the answers were compiled into the ten categories of competencies listed here.

As you look through the competencies, notice how even those that seem to be related only to the job apply to success in life as well. For example number 10, business/job acumen, applies whether you work for someone else or for yourself. Unless you are lucky enough to have inherited such a vast fortune that you will never have to work or produce anything, the ability to be effective in business and/or on the job is critical to your overall success.

Notice too, that only the tenth item on the list requires specific job skills training. There are two others that job-related training can improve, but only to a degree. All of the competencies require factors that are rarely considered and which cannot be seen on the surface. Neither standard practices nor commonly measured personality traits, such as observable traits or perceived preferences, can determine whether these factors are in place.

### Top 10 Competencies Essential to Excellence on the Job (and in Life)

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To ensure that you (and/or your employees) are at the top of your game and moving through work and life successfully, competence specific traits must be developed to healthy levels and emotional intelligence must be sufficiently high. When these essential factors are coupled with natural temperament and the right training for skills development, the result is consistently high performance, overall effectiveness and certain success.

When temperament is matched to one's profession or to a job position, and sufficient job skills training is provided, any reasonably intelligent person can do the job. But what people are capable of doing and what energizes, and drives positive behaviors and competence are two completely different things. The reality is that job competence alone has never produced a superstar. Only those who have a natural interest and natural attributes developed to healthy levels, and who have sufficient amounts of EQ to go with it, as well as the learned skills, ever make it to the top and stay there. A review of the competencies and how they apply will provide some insight as to why this is so.

**CORE Competencies Review**

1. **The Ability to Communicate Clearly and Effectively**

For genuine and effective communication to occur there must be an awareness of the different communicational styles, an understanding and appreciation for individual differences, and a willingness to move outside one's own comfortable style in order to connect with others.

Effective, competent communication requires far more than just general listening skills and the ability to respond to what was said. Listening must go beyond the words themselves. There must be an awareness and understanding of intent. There must also be a willingness to tailor one's response to fit, not just the spoken words, but also the needs and intent of the speaker.

For this to occur, one must know not only his or her own communicational style and preferences, but those of the other person as well. Almost all cross communications are unintentional. Generally, both parties will report that they are working very hard to understand or make sense of what the other person is trying to convey. When attempts at communication are frequently frustrated, the result is often avoidance of any attempt at genuine conversation with the offending party, which only increases the opportunities for misunderstanding and conflict to occur.

Awareness of different communicational styles requires awareness of natural traits and tendencies, and of the reasons for the behaviors one can observe. Learning to recognize each of the communicational types can enable an individual to stop when communications seem to be crossed up or stymied and thoughtfully examine what might be happening. Since stepping outside of one's own style to connect with another requires both foresight and empathy, a healthy degree of development around the empathy trait and emotional intelligence (EQ) must also be present.

The traits described in this and each of the following categories are natural to certain personality types and need to be taught to others. The value of knowing who owns certain traits naturally and who needs to be trained to use them is immense because it allows for more targeted training and far superior results. Those who need the most training should get the most. Those for whom such traits are natural strengths not only require less training, they can actually be recruited as mentors for those who need to learn.

2. **The Ability to Relate to Others Well, Individually and in Teams**

To connect with others in a meaningful and satisfying way requires a high degree of awareness - awareness of one's own interpersonal style and that of the person one is dealing with. It also requires an awareness of the immediate wants or needs (motivators) of the other person. For most people this is
accomplished through training that teaches recognition and conscious awareness of the different types of people and full understanding of how to communicate with, connect to, inspire and motivate each type.

Generally, for this type of training to be integrated and applied effectively and consistently the trainee must have a healthy degree of EQ and the development of relationship building traits. For those not naturally adept at relationship building or who lack genuine interest in learning, long term training and often coaching is necessary, and even then this competency will be marginal or situational unless there is a compelling reason to develop it. Those who are relationally undeveloped or who lack emotional maturity (EQ) are not likely to apply any amount of training effectively or consistently. Relationship competence requires attentiveness on the part of the perceiver and those who are undeveloped and immature tend to be too unaware or self-absorbed to adequately attend to others. The good news is that EQ can be developed in adults with the proper training. Short-term or self-paced online training is not proper training for the development of this competency.

Teamwork - There are some types who are naturally better at teamwork than others, but anyone with relatively healthy levels relationship specific development and EQ can learn to work competently within a team environment. Knowing how each type performs within a team environment and in what capacities they are likely to excel is extremely useful. Knowing the natural traits as well as development levels and EQ of each team member can guide the team leader in assigning roles to the right people and can inform the type and degree of training necessary for optimal outcomes.

3. Honesty, Integrity and Ethics

Honesty, integrity and ethics are all products of healthy personal development and emotional intelligence. Without a high degree of self-esteem few people believe themselves worthy of the esteem of others and, when gaining and keeping the esteem of others are not factors, honesty, integrity and ethical behaviors lack importance. High self-esteem is a product of deep self-awareness, self-appreciation, living authentically, and having faith in one’s own abilities and the ability to be discerning about others. These factors express themselves on the CORE personal effectiveness graph as high levels of positive traits development in the dominant and secondary styles, at least moderate development of the backup style, and the presence of non-reactionary coping patterns across the board. High self-esteem generates esteem and regard for others and fosters a climate where honesty, integrity and ethics are a high priority.

4. Good Judgment and Accountability

Like integrity and ethics, good judgment and accountability are present only in those who have a healthy sense of self and a high degree of EQ. Until an individual is emotionally mature enough to defer gratification in consideration of the bigger picture and the greater good, and to act accordingly, momentary or emotional whims can lead the individual off in unpredictable and unproductive directions. Those who are unpredictable can rarely be counted upon to a high degree. As with integrity and ethics, the maturity levels and personal development that predict good judgment and accountability are expressed in the CORE personal effectiveness graph as high levels of development in the dominant and secondary styles, at least moderate development of the backup style, and the presence of non-reactionary coping patterns across the board.

5. Ability to Make Independent Decisions and Problem-Solve

The decision making portion of this competency is an area where natural traits play a large role in outcomes. Each of the types makes decisions differently and each brings something of value (as well as potential limitations) to the decision-making role. Some types make decisions quickly while others need to ponder the information before coming to a conclusion. The benefits and limitations inherent to either path tend to find balance only in those whose traits are developed in healthy ways across at least three of four trait sets. How effectively decisions are shared with others is more a product of EQ and personal development than of personality traits, though even here some types are more willing and capable of
sharing information than others and training may be necessary for those less naturally inclined in this direction.

Creativity, logic and general intelligence are important factors in problem-solving. The thinking types tend to prefer solving problems using logic, while creative problem-solving tends to be preferred by the feeling types. As in each of the other competencies, EQ and development levels play a huge role in how effectively creativity, logic and intelligence are applied, but knowing how each employee is likely to go about problem-solving (logically or creatively) can greatly increase the odds of getting desired outcomes.

6. Innovation and Risk

Both innovation and risk-taking have a basis in personality. Some types avoid risk and innovation while others embrace them. Also, innovation can look very different from one type to another. The thinking (logical) types may prefer to innovate along technical or procedural lines while the feeling types may be more innovative where people are concerned. The bold types are greater risk-takers by nature than are the reserved types, but bigger risks are not always better ones. Whether a risk is taken wisely or foolhardily is more a matter of EQ and personal development.

7. Commitment and Dependability

Those who are committed to positive outcomes and to making a difference; who constantly strive to improve self, others and the organization, and who persist in consistent, dependable ways always have high levels of self-esteem, empathy and personal drive. Different types of people are driven for different reasons and knowing what will motivate each type is important, but persistent or consistent actions that lead to dependability and long-term commitments in any type are dependent on personal development levels and/or EQ.

Personality type may be able to predict how an individual is likely to apply this competency and in which areas he/she is most likely to have a high enough interest to remain committed, but personality type alone cannot predict whether the individual will apply the abilities that are available to him/her. Only those who have developed their personality traits in healthy ways and are emotionally mature enough to manage themselves well can be counted upon to utilize them effectively and consistently.

8. Determination and Initiative

To demonstrate initiative, energy and tenacity in achieving goals and resolving problems, and to maintain focus and perspective in the face of challenges requires working in a job that compliments, rather than challenges, one's natural traits. Working against our nature is like constantly swimming upstream. No matter how valiantly we try, in time we wear down and no longer have the energy or enthusiasm to excel. It's hard to maintain focus and perspective when we are struggling just to keep afloat. Working with one's nature is like floating downstream. Nature itself assists every step of the way, providing natural skill development, ample enthusiasm and energy to spare.

To ensure that people are working with their nature, it is essential to know what their nature is. Many people have been conditioned to behave in ways that are actually in conflict with their nature so trying to determine an employee's nature (and best job role) based on current behaviors can be misleading and disappointing. People who show little energy or enthusiasm for their work and who require a lot of managing and external motivation to keep them on track are either in jobs that are contrary to their nature or their nature is very undeveloped and/or immature. Knowing which you are dealing with can help you to determine whether the best solution is to move the individual to a better suited position or help them to better develop their natural traits and EQ.
9. Ability and Willingness to follow Protocol

Following protocol requires a willingness to work for the good of the whole, as well as the ability to adhere to specific plans, processes and procedures. While adherence to plans and procedures comes more naturally and easily to some types than to others, each type can be effective at this competency provided EQ is well developed. Following protocol, especially when it is not complimentary to natural inclinations, requires the ability to delay gratification or find gratification in processes and procedures outlined by someone else. Knowing which employees prefer working within such parameters and which are more likely to resist can help leaders focus their efforts and keep their teams working more productively. As in most every area of life and work, those with healthy levels of EQ are most likely to plan ahead, delay gratification for the overall good and work together cooperatively.

10. Business Acumen

Business acumen is largely a product of knowledge, effective training and empowerment. Most people perform far better in an environment where they know exactly what is expected of them and how their work fits into and impacts the company as a whole. Yet, even here those with high levels of personal development (PD) and EQ perform far above the rest. When those with high PD and EQ have a clear picture of what is expected of them and are given the tools and freedoms they need to perform their work, they can be as much as 12 times more effective than the average worker according to research funded by the Ford Motor Company and several top universities.

Getting business results (which might be defined as contributing to the company's profitability through actions and decisions that are cost effective, adding value to the business, being consistent with the company's strategic business objectives; and ensuring that desired quality standards are established, maintained and achieved) requires good company training, knowledge sharing, and goal definition on the company's part. It also requires a high degree of PD and EQ on the employee's part. Actions, such as accepting responsibility for results, setting measurable standards of achievement for self and others, working through others (rather than micro-managing) and championing the efforts of others requires healthy levels of both EQ and PD.

CORE Competencies - LEADERSHIP

Bringing Out the Best in People

There are areas of this competency that are natural to some types and areas that are natural to other types. For example, the ability to assess and address performance issues competently and hold people accountable would come more naturally to the CORE type called Commander or one of the Commander combinations, while the ability to coach, mentor, and help others develop their capabilities would come more naturally to Commander's opposite type, Relater or one of the Relater combinations. As in every other area, only those who are developed to healthy levels across all trait sets and have a high degree of EQ will be most competent in bringing out the best in others. No one willingly follows someone who they view as immature, uncaring or incompetent, which is how those lacking in personal development and/or EQ are often perceived.

Maximizing Organizational Capabilities

To maximize organizational capabilities through identifying, recruiting and developing the people who are best suited to their roles requires that those responsible for this competency have a thorough and workable knowledge of personality types and temperaments (natural traits and tendencies) and the ability to identify types beyond their current behaviors. This is especially true in the recruitment arena since most people are on their best behaviors during job interviews. It is important to be able to see past behavioral facades and discover how well the traits an individual displays and/or claims to have are developed. It is also important to be able to distinguish natural traits from conditioned ones.
The Diversity Factor
Environments that truly embrace diversity are those where there is an in-depth and on-going awareness of, and appreciation for, what each individual brings to the group. This awareness and appreciation must go far beyond acceptance of age, gender, race and cultural differences. Most workplace conflicts do not occur as a result of these factors. Most occur as a result of personality and communicational differences, which are resolved far easier when these critical factors are addressed and understood.

While generational and cultural differences can certainly impact understanding and communication, these factors are less of a factor than natural personality, developmental and EQ differences in connecting and communicating effectively. These exist within and across every age, gender, race and culture, and are the source of as much as 80% of workplace conflicts. Diversity training that fails to address these crucial factors is neglecting areas that are essential for deep understanding and acceptance of different points of view, and different approaches and methodologies.

Empowerment
Competence at empowering others requires high self-esteem, EQ and interpersonal intelligence. High self-esteem and EQ are necessary because empowering others to excel independently and to possibly equal or exceed one’s own accomplishments takes a lot of confidence and inner strength, and a lot of maturity. Interpersonal intelligence is necessary to enable us to know how, when, whom and how much to empower those we lead.

The Personality Factor in Leadership Competencies
Leadership competencies require certain functions that are inherent to particular trait sets which are generally assigned to different personality types. In some cases the functions necessary to easily move through a particular competency belong to very different personality types so what is natural for one leader may need to be developed in another. To ensure that leaders are fully functioning and effective, it is important to know which functions are already developed and which will need further development. People function most effortlessly when using their natural dominant and secondary styles. Any personality type with well-developed, non-reactionary traits across the board can be a good leader in the right arena. Understanding the leadership style of each type can help organizations choose the best leader for each department, which has the effect of creating more a cohesive environment, engendering excellence in every area and ensuring greater success for everyone.