

## Emotional Intelligence Becoming Key in Today's Workplace

By Laura Fick

In 2001, Philippe Taillet, a senior vice president at Gaithersburg-based Sodexo - a food and facilities management services company - decided he wanted to reorganize the company's IT department.

"We found that the IT department was not really working well," Taillet said. The employees "had the technical skills to do their jobs, but they didn't have the people skills."

To help develop these more intuitive skills in his employees, Taillet began working with Argosy International, a Columbia-based consulting firm that specializes in strategic management services and leadership development programs. Argosy provided an "emotional intelligence" assessment and training to the department's more than 300 employees.

"The idea was that we really needed to work on team building," said Taillet. "We needed to develop an awareness of differences in people's behaviors and characters. The solution to making things work well was to make sure they work as a team."

### Lead Indicator

It's as simple as anyone's common day. While leaving in the morning, a loved one makes

a biting remark. Then traffic is a nightmare. Once at work, the boss interrupts subordinates during a meeting, rendering their opinions useless.

All of these circumstances involve emotions, negatively impacting a worker's job performance. According to experts, it's emotional intelligence, which refers to how a worker handles adverse situations while in the workplace, that may be the best indicator of how successfully employees perform.

"More than twice as important a predictor of success than IQ or job knowledge is emotional intelligence," said Jim Muth, eastern regional director for Toronto-based Institute of Health and Human Potential (IHHP). "The people that really excel are the people who are able to bring those emotional intelligence skills in times of stress and challenge."

In order to deliver emotional intelligence skills to local executives like Taillet, Argosy recently partnered with the IHHP. The deal allows Argosy to provide a sophisticated emotional intelligence tool that the company hopes will differentiate it from other firms offering executive consultation services to the commercial, government and nonprofit industries.

The tool "provides an assessment of emotional intel-



Richard Yocum, managing director of Argosy International

ligence coming from many different directions," said Richard Yocum, managing director of Argosy, which he founded eight years ago. "It guides the leaders to discover how they can be more effective in their organizations with emotional competencies."

The tool assesses input from an array of an executive's peers, including his boss, clients, associates, colleagues, family, friends and even himself - to determine the leader's competencies in such skills as empathy, personal drive, organizational optimism, authenticity and communications.

### Leveraging Strengths

Once the assessment is complete, Yocum and his team provide individual coaching and extensive training to assist the leader in becoming aware

of and in developing his or her skills. At that point, Yocum said, the leader is better able to guide the company through change or empower employees toward growth.

"Executives are counting on their IQ and their technical expertise to manage day-to-day," Yocum said. "Those are necessary, but not totally what is needed to be an effective leader. That's where emotional intelligence comes into play. It makes the difference between the executive who can lead day-to-day and the executive who can really assert the vision and make change."

"Emotional intelligence helps leaders to bring all of the knowledge and capabilities to the game every day," said IHHP's Muth, whose regional office is located in Ellicott City. "Particularly in the last 10 years with everything becoming global and the amount of change in technology...There is more change and more stressful environments. People's need to manage their emotions has become more critical."

Argosy has offered the assessment tool to more than 100 executives during the last 18 months. Yocum has found that the biggest focus for the executives has been mining and developing strengths, rather than trying to create competencies that do not already exist.

"When executives learn

how to become managers, they become...experts in identifying gaps or weaknesses and are less effective in assessing strengths and leveraging those strengths," he said. "We have found that the outcomes and the successes by leveraging strengths can be far greater than filling gaps."

### **Growing Interest**

Local employers are find-

ing that emotional intelligence is becoming a critical factor not only in developing leaders, but also in determining which potential employees to hire.

"Emotional intelligence is something that is a very valuable skill," said Todd Allen, director of human resources for Howard Community College and the president of the Howard County Human Resources Society (HCHRS). "Sometimes it's viewed as a soft skill, but I

think it can have a big impact as it relates to success on the job and for job skills."

According to Allen, the interest in emotional intelligence and related topics seems to be growing. In the last seven months, the HCHRS has offered four different educational sessions with similar themes to its membership. Allen estimates that each session was attended by about 55 of the group's 180 members.

"I think [interest] is very much increasing, particularly among human resources professionals. I think they're seeing it as something that can tie well into leadership development programs and coaching," he said. "When you start to realize how important people are, you realize they are made up of other things, including their emotional states, and they bring that into their jobs."