

## Well THAT Was a Surprise!

*Emotional Intelligence is Key to Recruiting Success*

by Cheryl A. Brown, Esq.

*"The firm would like to invite your candidate to meet with a group of our attorneys."*

Every legal recruiter delights in hearing those words. For a rookie legal recruiter, landing the first candidate interview is a big accomplishment. Recently, a former colleague shared stories about his early days as a legal recruiter when he started over 10 years ago. Jeff recalled being ecstatic after landing his first candidate interview with an Am Law 100 firm. He was representing a strong, senior level IP associate – let's call him Matt. Jeff scheduled a coffee meeting with Matt to help prepare him for the firm interview.

Two days before the scheduled interview, Jeff spent a considerable amount of time prepping Matt. He provided Matt with insights about the firm and its national IP practice, advised Matt on presenting a positive first impression, and discussed how to showcase his background and experience. Together, they worked on Matt's responses to the most frequently asked interview questions and role-played his responses to tough interview questions. Providing this service to candidates is an often overlooked value add of working with a legal recruiter. Prepping the candidate adequately can tip the scales in favor of an offer.

Matt went through multiple rounds of interviews, and it looked like an offer was at hand. The last step was a lunch meeting with four partners in the firm's IP group. Everything went well - until dessert.

On the day of the interview, Matt was confident and well-prepared for a successful interview. He reviewed the firm bios of the four partners along with recent articles and news about the well-regarded IP practice. Matt arrived a few minutes early at the popular steakhouse the firm selected for lunch. The interview started off as you would expect. The partners asked Matt a series of questions about his law school, his background, and law firm experience. Matt felt like he established rapport and did a great job of answering the partners' questions.

Toward the end of the meal, the firm's highly regarded IP practice group leader started peppering Matt with personal questions. Initially, the conversation went well. However, after the IP practice group leader ordered his second martini and dessert, he took a more aggressive tone and approach with his questions. He pointedly asked Matt to identify his sexual orientation. The partner was visibly intoxicated, as he joked about what he assumed to be Matt's sexual preference.

This stream of questions continued for the remainder of lunch. Understandably, Matt was taken aback by these questions and felt uncomfortable answering them. The other partners mostly remained silent. At the end of lunch, the IP practice head wrapped his arms around Matt and pulled him for a bear hug. He commented that Matt would be a great fit for the IP team. Matt was mortified by the encounter and relieved when the interview was over.

Unsurprisingly, Matt declined the firm's subsequent offer.

*"...legal recruiters are increasingly incorporating EI in recruiting candidates and working with clients."*

Jeff shared Matt's feedback with the law firm's recruiter, detailing the IP partner's inappropriate questions and inebriation during lunch. It was concerning that the partner had complete disregard for how his behavior affected Matt. Apparently, this rainmaking partner was known for asking candidates strange and inappropriate questions. Consequently, Jeff has not presented additional candidates to this practice.

This bizarre interview didn't deter Jeff from his goals. It actually impacted how he approached recruiting from that point forward. He continued to work tirelessly to build relationships with other law firms. After several rounds of firm interviews and negotiations, Jeff successfully placed Matt with a firm, where he is now a partner. This placement marked a watershed moment in Jeff's legal recruiting career. That unforgettable first interview sparked Jeff's interest in learning more about the importance of emotional intelligence in recruiting, particularly in the interview process.

Emotional intelligence, also known as emotional quotient or EQ, refers to an individual's ability to understand, manage, and express their own emotions, as well as perceive and influence the emotions of others. In recruiting, this skill set is crucial for successful interpersonal relationships, effective communication, and overall personal and professional success.

In 1995, Daniel Goleman published his ground-breaking book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*. In this book, he identified five key components of emotional intelligence ("EI"): empathy, social skills, self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation. Emotional intelligence has been a topic of much interest and research in recent years, and new concepts have emerged that expand the traditional definition of EI.

## Core Components of Emotional Intelligence



1. Empathy – the ability to understand how others are feeling, is absolutely critical to emotional intelligence. It involves more than just being able to recognize the emotional states of others. It also involves your responses to people based on this information. If you are empathetic, and you sense someone is feeling sad or hopeless, you would treat them with more care and concern or try to buoy their spirits.
2. Social Skills – being able to interact well with others is another important aspect of emotional intelligence. Having strong social skills allows people to build meaningful relationships with other people and develop a stronger understanding of themselves and others. True emotional understanding involves more than just understanding your own emotions and those of others. You also need to be able to put this information to work in your daily interactions and communications.
3. Self-Awareness – the ability to recognize and understand your own emotions. Beyond just recognizing your emotions, however, is being aware of the effects of your actions, moods and emotions on other people. To become self-aware, you must be capable of monitoring your own emotions, recognizing different emotional reactions, and then correctly identifying each particular emotion.
4. Self-Regulation – in addition to being aware of your own emotions and the impact you have on others, emotional intelligence requires you to be able to regulate and manage your emotions. This doesn't mean putting emotions on lockdown and hiding your true feelings, it simply means waiting for the right time and place to express them.
5. Motivation – Intrinsic motivation is another important emotional intelligence skill. People who are emotionally intelligent are motivated by things beyond external rewards like fame, money, recognition, and acclaim. Instead, they have a passion to fulfill their own inner needs and goals. They seek internal rewards, and experience satisfaction and contentment from being totally in tune with an activity. Those who are competent in this area tend to be action oriented. They set goals, have a high need for achievement, and are always looking for ways to do better.

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/components-of-emotional-intelligence-2795438>

The benefits of developing and improving EI are vast. More and more legal recruiters are increasingly incorporating EI in recruiting candidates and working with clients. By considering a candidate's EI, recruiters can assess their interpersonal skills, empathy, and ability to handle conflicts and stress, which can help lead to better communications, stronger relationships, and more successful placements.

Over the past few years, Jeff has made a conscious effort to place a greater emphasis on EI in managing his recruiting desk. Through training and mentorship, he is constantly working to enhance his EI and communication skills to be more efficient and empathetic in working with candidates, colleagues, and other recruiters. He has found it to be particularly helpful working with lateral partner candidates who are initially reluctant to fully discuss their portable book of business (or lack thereof). More recently, Jeff has incorporated EI tests and assessments to help screen and evaluate potential candidates. Similarly, Jeff is employing EI during

his meetings with law firm clients. He regularly meets with firms and finds that many law firms struggle with describing or distinguishing themselves. Jeff is using his soft skills to help managing partners and recruiting professionals at firms dig deep and identify the firm's unique selling points – what sets the firm apart from the competition.

The growing emphasis on EI is a signal that some law firms need to shift their thinking, too. Jeff strongly suggests that law firm interviewers factor EI concepts into their interview style and approach. Moreover, law firm leaders who possess a high degree of EI have the capacity to attract and retain exceptional lawyers as well as create a supportive and inclusive firm culture. Law firm leaders set the tone for the firm.

After 10 years of legal recruiting, Jeff realizes that EI was not just a useful tool, but an essential part of his long and challenging journey as a recruiter. He is grateful for the early lessons in EI and looking forward to new advances. He believes Artificial Emotional Intelligence (AEI) will be a game-changer in the recruitment space over the next several years. AEI is a subset of artificial intelligence that measures, understands, simulates, and reacts to human emotions. Jeff envisions this technology can be used to analyze and replicate the soft skills required for high performing legal recruiters. This information can then be used to train teams of legal recruiters and optimize their performance.

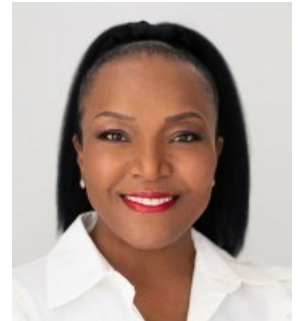
Now, as a seasoned recruiter, Jeff says he still celebrates when he lands an interview for a candidate. He celebrates even more when he sends the invoice.

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