

this time in the right direction, skyrocketing a remarkable 30 points.

Foley recalls that "when this score appeared on the screen, the room broke out in applause. Not only was there relief on my part, but I could see it in everyone around the room."

What made the dramatic difference?

During a learning lab at ASAE & The Center's 2009 Annual Meeting & Expo in Toronto, Foley and AAEP's director of public relations, Sally Baker, APR, explained that personnel changes during the year accounted for some, but not all, of the improved emotional intelligence and teamwork.

Foley says he looked first at his own leadership: "I took a hard look in the mirror and wondered what I was doing or not doing to contribute to this through my own management style. I began to make some changes."

He lists "increasing transparency and being a more open communicator, as well as trying to foster more communication within the office through regular staff meetings, having more of an open-door policy. If you hear something that doesn't sound right, ask me; I'll tell you. Trying to nip things in the bud before they spin out of control."

Foley made it clear that everyone on the team had a responsibility to shape the type of environment they wanted to work in. "By labeling this dysfunction and discussing the problems and solutions together, we were able to work through the issues," he says.

Baker describes a few of the "back-to-basics" changes in communication and collaboration:

- By the end of the 2008 retreat, each team member committed to changing his or her attitude and behavior, starting immediately.
- Because all team members shared that retreat experience and commitment, they felt empowered to monitor each other in positive ways.
- They also shared a common language to identify inappropriate workplace behavior. Example (with credit to trainers Ben and Roz Zander): "Downward spiral conversations" are conversations that don't go anywhere.
- The AAEP staff noted the importance of more personal interaction in the office, reminiscent of MBWA—management by wandering around. One smiling staffer quipped, "We've even learned to recognize whose footsteps are coming down the hall."

Foley wrapped up the learning lab with this statement: "Unlike your IQ, emotional intelligence is something you can change and develop. As we've experienced as an office, and as Sally and I both have experienced individually, it can have such an impact on every aspect of both your personal and professional life. We've even introduced emotional intelligence concepts to our board and future leaders at the Emerging Leaders Workshop that Tom facilitated in October 2008."

Foley concluded: "So is AAEP now emotionally intelligent? We've made progress. We have a ways to go, and we have to be certain we never slip back into the behaviors that were eroding excellence."

That's how leaders of learning organizations think—and act!

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