

# Emotional intelligence undervalued by employers

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff

Employers should prioritize emotional intelligence in searches for new hires, Toronto workplace violence consultant [Denise Koster](#) tells AdvocateDaily.com.

Koster, principal of [Koster Consulting Associates](#), says the traditional approach to hiring, where employers focus on credentials like education and previous work experience, underestimates the value of emotional intelligence in candidates.

“Fit within an organization's culture is much more important than skill level. You can teach skills, but you can't teach attitude,” she says. “When you select the wrong hire, time is spent onboarding and training them and in the end, a tremendous amount of time can be wasted dealing with absenteeism, conflict and high turnover.”

And while some organizations are waking up to the value of emotional intelligence, Koster says they will often leave questions assessing these qualities until the second or third stage of the interview process, after a number of candidates have already been eliminated.

“Employers need to spend more time preparing for the initial screening as opposed to focusing on the final outcome. I think it needs to come up in the first interview because if the person's not going to be a fit, there's no point going any further with them,” she says.

“Being pressed for time is no excuse for making a hasty decision. Companies end up having to make a choice between two unsatisfactory parties who looked good on paper but don't have a high level of emotional intelligence. Employers don't want to go through the hassle of putting out a new call for candidates, but they end up causing more havoc in the workplace because they hire someone who can't communicate effectively, manage their temper or resolve conflict.”

According to Koster, early screening interviews should aim to achieve a deeper understanding of a candidate's empathy level, awareness of their own emotions, and ability to regulate their own behaviour.

She says interviewers can more accurately expose candidates' views by probing them for their own examples of times when they have faced difficult situations in the workplace, rather than presenting them with typical scenarios and asking how they would respond.

“If you ask someone what they would do if they saw someone being harassed in the workplace, it’s easy for them to give a standard canned answer about intervening or reporting the problem,” Koster says. “But if you ask them to describe a situation where they were faced with an ethical dilemma or how they responded to criticism of their work style, you’ll learn much more about that individual.”

Having potential employees describe the types of personalities they struggle to work with, instances when they succeeded in the execution of a project, and situations when they witnessed harassment can be particularly valuable to employers, she says.

“Terms like harassment are not always well defined, even though they’re widely used, so the answers they give will tell you about what constitutes inappropriate behaviour for them, and that can be very telling.”

Koster says she would place the same emphasis on emotional intelligence regardless of the seniority of the job opening.

“It doesn’t matter if the candidate will work largely on their own or if it’s the CEO. People at all levels need to have the same expectations,” she says. “Once people are hired, I think an organization should also be looking at ongoing training to fine-tune emotional intelligence skills and make this training compulsory.”