

Transcript of TrustTalk podcast Interview with Bert Iedema

Voice-over: Welcome to TrustTalk. Our guest today is Bert Iedema. He is an executive coach who focuses on EQ or emotional intelligence, the ability to sense, to understand, to value and effectively apply the power of emotions as a source of human energy, information and trust. Deep trust and high expectations are set to be two pillars of high-performing cultures, and EQ is essential to both. Your host today, Severin de Wit.

Interviewer: Bert, welcome at TrustTalk. You are an executive coach for both members of supervisory boards and managers at board level. So you know what it takes as you have been member of various boards yourself, you are an expert in strengthening EQ or emotional intelligence. And before we get into the question how this relates to trust, maybe it's good to explain what EQ is in your view and how that is being used in your coaching work?

Bert Iedema: Yes, thank you, Severin. Before I answer your question, sometimes there is confusion out there about the differences between the words EQ, emotional quotient and emotional intelligence. EQ is nothing else than a measurement of emotional intelligence. Like IQ is a measurement of, let's say, rational intelligence. So this is the difference between those words, and normally I use the word EQ, as most people do. To explain it in the simplest way possible, I would suggest to just reverse the words emotional intelligence. It is becoming more intelligent in handling emotions. And there are four basic core components. The first one is self-awareness, which means being able to recognize your own emotions. The second component is self-regulation, and that means to be able to regulate your own emotions. The third one is being able to recognize emotions in other people. And the fourth one is being able to regulate emotions of other people. These are the four components that all academics agree about that are elements of emotional intelligence.

Interviewer: Ok, so we will probably go into that a little later during our interview, right?

Bert Iedema: Yes. But I would like to enter this stage that some people add motivation or empathy or even broaden the definition to include social skills. That dilutes, in my view, the concept of emotional intelligence.

Interviewer: Then it seems like a very broad definition, and it's very difficult to define what it actually does in management.

Bert ledema: Correct, because then the purpose behind it is to figure out what are the right personality skills? What are what is the right behavior for a leader? Then there is much more to the emotional intelligence, but it dilutes the concept

Interviewer: Emotional intelligence, as you call it, is often described as a crucial component of leadership, like you just said and to manage your emotions, as well as recognize and influence others' emotions is considered to be one of the strongest indicators of workplace performance. Would you agree with that?

Bert ledema: Yes, totally. And I could add there is a bunch of scientific evidence out there that indicates that your statement is right, both in what people would call hard areas and in soft areas. In soft areas that helps to contribute to lower job rotation, more alignment of your employees with purpose, higher job satisfaction, less conflicts, more connection. In hard areas, emotional intelligence contributes to higher stock prices, higher profitability, higher productivity, higher sales and so on.

Interviewer: So all good things,

Bert ledema: All good things and even better, emotions are contagious, especially in groups and close teams. We have in our brain what people call mirror neurons, which literally help us to pick up emotions from others and to behave in a similar way as that other person. So that is the reason why a high emotional intelligence of a leader contributes for about 35 percent to its effectiveness.

Interviewer: That's what research says.

Bert ledema: This is what research says, yes, academics agree on that.

Interviewer: To quote an expert or on emotional intelligence, another expert, I should say, then Daniel Goleman, he said, "emotional intelligence is the ability to sense, to understand, to value

and effectively apply the power of emotions as a source of human energy, information, trust, there it is, finally, creativity and influence". Does that paint a fair picture of what EQ means?

Bert Iedema: Yes, it is a beautiful definition, although to some people it may sound a little abstract and I would add some elements to it. Three. The first one is, it helps you to connect with others through empathy, changing yourself from the send mode to the listening mode. Secondly, your personal emotional stability grows and certainly your connection with your intuition, which in turn generates creativity, which also functions as your life compares in many other areas, ranging from alignment with your personal life mission to practical decisions as to how to build the most effective team.

Interviewer: Deep trust and high expectations are said to be two pillars of high-performing cultures, and EQ is essentially to both. It is said that when leaders set high expectations without the EQ necessary to create trust, they breed anxiety, they breed stress and burnout. Is that also your experience?

Bert Iedema: Yeah to a large extent, yes. You say they set high expectations without EQ. As long as you mean without applying EQ, rather than having EQ, it is about applying and not about having EQ.

Interviewer: So it's not something you have something, you

Bert Iedema: all people. To some extent, we all have some capability to be emotionally intelligent, but for most people it has to be trained. It has to be developed. And in addition, you have to actively apply it. Like most skills, if you don't apply it, what's the use of having it? So I agree as long as it is about applying and yeah, how could you listen well without applying some empathy? How could you know what people need if you don't really look at them? How could you form a fair opinion about your people without recognizing the influence of your own emotions on them and on your judgments?

Interviewer: So one of the emotional intelligence skills leaders need is what people consider self-awareness, so having a clear understanding of one's strength, but also your limitations, your emotions, your beliefs and your motivations. Interestingly enough, a survey by consulting

firm Korn Ferry shows that 79% percent of executives surveyed, had at least one what I would call blind spot or a skill they ranked among their strongest that others reported as a weakness.

Bert Iedema: Yeah, I completely agree. Knowing yourself better emotionally is really the basis of everything, and it was the first component that I mentioned when you asked your first question. Emotional blockades and disturbances are created already in the earliest years of your childhood. You then perfect them and they become automated software programs in your brain. Everybody generates thousands of such mini programs, I would call them. And as you have automated them, you are not aware anymore that they exist and that they can get triggered. And when they get triggered, it could even happen by something seemingly completely unimportant.

Interviewer: So are you saying that this actually developed while you are a child? So in other words, it's in the early stages already there or not

Bert Iedema: even in the earliest stages before your age of 3, you hardly do have any memories of your first three years already in that period, many of those programs are already generated and automated, and in those years in your early years, those programs, what's the function of those programs is to protect yourself. It is in the best interest of yourself given in that situation, there's nothing else that you can do, then perform some kind of response to some trigger, an emotional response. And when you get older, those situations change, you have more control of your environments, but you are not prepared. You still have those programs. They are not functional anymore, but I still get triggered to something that you are not aware about. I'll give you a very simple example. For example, you could become very angry or paralyzed or whatever, only when somebody starts to talk softly to. Is that wrong, why could that happen Maybe because your father always did that before he hit you with the stick when you were two years old. You even don't remember anymore. So when people in the boardroom, you're all 40, 50, 60 years olds start talking socially, you are the one who gets angry. And they have no clue where it comes from. So how to behave different

Interviewer: Yeah and how to handle this and how?

Bert Iedema: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: to respond to people who are not aware of your background in your childhood.

Bert Iedema: And there are all kinds of techniques and training ways to become aware of it and to handle it better.

Interviewer: Trust and emotions are very closely linked. I had an interview earlier with George Smits, a Dutch psychologist and an emotion management expert, who also wrote the book "How to Handle Emotions", and when I started the interview, he asked me the question rather than me asking the question to him, and he asked me, "Do you like sea sailing" So I was kind of like, huh, sea sailing? In sailing, you are dealing with two forces, wind and the current of the sea. Wind you can see, currents you can't. So, you can be sailing hard and still not making any progress, he said. Sailing has that in common with life, as he explains, you are dealing, you're doing all kinds of things, but you don't make any progress. And George Smits says that's what emotion management is about, and I thought there was a wonderful comparison. Would you agree with me?

Bert Iedema: It's a beautiful comparison. What basically happens at a visible level, a recognizable level, we are that we can see and feel and hear with our senses. We are in the realm of facts. You can verify trends. You can analyse customer needs. You can discuss production mistakes and develop superior plans and procedures. That's all the realm of facts, of the ratio of your left brain half. However, below the surface, and then we are talking about your right brain half, below the surface. there are some downstream that holds you back, regardless what analysis you make and whatever plans you are making. That's downstream, that right half of your brain, that's the area of emotions. You feel attacked, you feel not seen, you feel not heard, you feel ignored or not treated well and go on and on and on. And that sets the triggers of all kinds of automatic responses, emotion-based responses that send you or your team or even your entire company in the wrong direction. You are simply not able to listen anymore, even if you want to, because your brain is absorbed by your emotions. People can present you all the facts, all what they want, but your own emotions block literally, literally block your listening ability. So you, your team, or even your company, continue to sail in the wrong direction even without being aware of it.

Interviewer: Bert, as this podcast is about trust, if we talk about EQ, I still have a little bit of difficulty in understanding the relationship between EQ and trust. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Bert ledema: What happens in a crisis situation and I go to your brain. In a crisis situation, all kinds of wrong hormones and wrong substances are released in and into your brain and these wrong substances, they block your neuro receptors. Neuro receptors are the little holes at the end of a neuron. As they are blocked, they, in turn, cannot receive anymore the right, useful neurotransmitters at that moment. So the wrong substances block the neuroreceptors, which cannot receive the right neurotransmitters. What is the consequence? Your access to your memory reduces your ability to reason becomes handicapped and you get into a fight or flight modus. How does the outside world perceive you as acting completely irrational? You are not irrational, but when your access to your memory is partly blocked and your reasoning capability is reduced, of course, you are arriving at different decisions, especially in complex situations.

Interviewer: How does that relate to trust? If your reasoning is affected like you just explained and you acting irrational rather than rational, people will, if you happen to do that more often, I guess, people start losing trust in what you do and what you say.

Bert ledema: of course

Interviewer: and if you are in a supervisory board, I think that's a bad characteristic, I would say

Bert ledema: Yes. So I agree. And what you see in both, let's take an extreme situation. You are in the board of stock listed company and there is an hostile takeover taking place. Like in our country, AKZO, a couple of years ago, where there was this American company, PPG, that tried to take over AKZO. And you may know from the newspapers, I don't know the persons personally, but the CEO got some kind of burn-out and had to step down. So that is quite an extreme situation of stress. What you see many times is that because of the stress, maybe he presents in the view of the supervisory board some kinds of an inferior plan? And what do those board members do who don't recognize what happens in the brain? Simply give the instruction, "go home and present a better plan". That is a quite a wrong instruction because you only put more pressure on the brain and the irrational behaviour increases rather than

decreases. So you should instead of that, you should be aware of what's going on in that brain of that specific person and concentrate on techniques and help and instruments to help him reduce his stress and to get people around him that do have less stress. Instead of just giving an instruction "come with a better plan", that only increases the stress and increases more production of the wrong hormones. So and then you have a totally distressed situation. It is the CEO who thinks, well, these boards cannot help me, and probably they are stressed themselves also, in a hostile takeover, personal reputation go on and on and on. Do I have to go to the courts? So they also do not recognize that they are responding from emotion themselves. You see in kind of a fight instead of a connection, and the trust is broken.

Interviewer: Research shows that productivity, let's talk about productivity for a moment, productivity increases as the EQ, so the emotional quotient of the company's leadership increases. So what is the relationship between productivity and EQ?

Bert Iedema: I agree with this research and there's a bunch of research. I mean, this is one of the areas where academics completely agree and they talk up to 35-40% improvement, which is a lot. Most companies are trying to improve by two or three percent these days. So what is behind it? When you help people and teams, you also have a concept of team emotional intelligence, which is not just the sum of the emotional intelligence of each team member, even when each team member does not have a very high emotional intelligence, still the team with the right training can increase its emotional intelligence to a very high level. Still, then, there's not a prerequisite that one or all team members need to have a personal high EQ. So that's an interesting fact. Now what happens when you train people or teams on improving their EQ? They become more constructive. They listen better. They are more open to diverse opinions. And this means that they have access to better information, that they process constructively and so they may arrive at different decisions. They show better teamwork. There is less conflict, so there's less time spent on negative things like resolving conflicts and so on, or people not wanting to work with each other. They know what team members need. They know what other departments need because of this listening modes and is open to diverse opinions. They're open to constructive criticism on their selves. They do not act defensive. They act on it constructively. They know, but it was customers really need because they listen and they show empathy. And that all is the basis of high productivity.

Interviewer: Earlier, at the beginning of our interview, you mentioned already whether low EQ is something that can be trained or whether it's in your DNA, so to speak. What is the situation? I mean, I just learned from you that in your childhood, you get certain developments that will later on affect your EQ. Is this something that you can completely train. Can you improve yourself and therefore being a more trusted person? Or is it something that you have or you don't have?

Bert Iedema: Yes. And that is quite different than IQ. It is really, really difficult to increase your IQ. With EQ, it's different, Although there is some DNA components. Not everybody will become a world champion in EQ. The good news is that you can really train it even by training and by coaching. And what I have seen in my coaching practice over and over and over again, let's say an executive comes in has a ranking at an EQ level of, let's say, 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. Most probably I would be able to bring him to a level 7 or so in just 8 coaching sessions. And the beauty is that his outside world, his environment perceives that level as an 8 or a 9. So you bring into 6,5 to 7 and they perceive it and both in the working environment and in the family environment. And what I thus far most of the times I have seen, is that even after three sessions already, people who don't know that the person is coached, already spontaneously start to give feedback: "you change so much for the better, what happened to you?" Unbelievable. And that is very, very rewarding, and that gives a big motivation to continue the track.

Interviewer: How come you ended up in the EQ? I mean, you are not a psychologist by training, are you?

Bert Iedema: No, no, certainly not. No. Well, it's I would almost say it's the classic story. Like about 10-12 years ago, I got a very bad divorce. My work was going wrong, physically was going wrong. Everything went wrong. And I remember vividly one moment I was sitting home at a Sunday and I took the biggest decision of my life. And I said to myself, here and now I decide that everything that happened to me, but then really, literally everything that happened to me, is caused by myself. And now I only have to figure out how that works. Because I had no clue. And then I set off on a completely different track. And well, I went to start to follow on a part-time basis one of the Buddhism passes, I went to courses, I went to EQ courses and then finally, gradually I figured out that emotions, emotion handling is the biggest thing that let's say people

in the boardrooms who, here in the Netherlands, most of them are highly educated, are male, are white and have been raised when they were young, their parents didn't want to talk about emotions, so they never learned it. They always suppressed it. And so I figured out that that is the way that is, that is helping them best.

Interviewer: So to conclude our interview question because you were just talking about men. Is there a difference between men and women in terms of the natural capability of having EQ?

Bert Iedema: Well, that's an interesting question. I use it always as a quiz question. There's no agreements between scientists. They do see a difference in EQ between women and men, but not a scientifically important It's a very low level. However, I mentioned four basic components, and if you would measure the EQ according to each different component, then you see some differences where women are better at recognizing emotions in themselves and in other people. And men are better in regulating. Some people would call that controlling. But controlling is more suppressing, but that's from the outside world, it looks as properly regulating. I wouldn't say that, but you see that men are better in regulating and women are better in recognizing. But there is not a very, very big statistic difference.

Interviewer: A final question, Bert, is it true that someone who has a high EQ, so emotional intelligence, is also a more trustworthy person?

Bert Iedema: I would say I would not say 100 percent, yes, but I would say this in a high correlation. There are several reasons for that. The first one what people intuitively do when they listen to other people, subconsciously is that they figure out whether body language matches with the words that people speak. Is that in conformance with each other? And if that is not, then that adds to distrust. And people who are not very well in handling dealing with emotions have a higher risk of using different words than their body language communicates because the body language really communicates what's going on and they are suppressing emotions and are telling you something different. Now you, as an listener, you don't know the reason, you only see that there is not conformity between the two, between the words and the body language, so that the risk of distrust is there. That's one. A second one. It's a very easy example. But suppose you, I are my employee and you arrive in my room when you have a problem. And I do not really listen. And I speak against you and I am going to negatively criticize

you. Why, what did you do about it? Did you work hard enough, et cetera? So this can come from my emotions that I am, let's say, I'm impatient because I'm under high pressure. I do not recognize that. So I treat you unfair without even knowing that. And what happens? You don't trust me, next time you rather go to somebody else and to me, with your same problem, because you don't feel heard. And if you don't feel heard, you start to distrust people. If people criticize you in an unfair way, even if this because of their own emotions, what you cannot see, but it happens in my mind. You distrust me. So you see many times when I handle my own emotions wrong, or your emotions, then you have response from me, that is not really the response that you need.

Interviewer: Yeah. And then in fact, the trust relationship.

Bert Iedema: Yes. You don't get the response, the emotional response that you need, the emotional response. Then the connection breaks and you experience it as distrust.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Bert, for your insights in the role of EQ. We've talked a little bit about trust, but more about EQ, but certainly the relationship is intriguing and absolutely a source for further research, I would say. Thank you very much, and I wish you all the best in your practice.

Bert Iedema: Thank you, Severin. Thank you.

Voice-over: We hope you enjoyed this episode of TrustTalk. We would be very grateful if you could leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or on your favourite podcast app. Don't miss out on future travels around trust and subscribe to this channel or visit us on our website TrustTalk.co or on Twitter at TrustTalkCo. We look forward to seeing you again soon.