

# Emotional Intelligence in Corrections

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## **Abstract**

*This paper will identify what emotional intelligence is and how it might relate to the public sector, more specifically Orange County Corrections. Since the public sector is generally behind when it comes to new ideas because of the bureaucracy, it is time to put into practice emotional intelligence evaluation and training. After a survey of current employees was conducted, an analysis was conducted to show if emotional intelligence evaluation and training are needed in the department.*

## **Introduction**

All too often, public entities fall behind the private sector when it comes to using new technologies and ideas. Whether it is because the wheels of the bureaucratic engine turn too slow or a steadfast resistance to change, the public sector is often the last to warm up to current trends. Emotional intelligence came to the forefront in the 1990's and the private sector took notice of its value. There is a belief that the ability to harness, control, and use emotions is a better gauge of a person's potential than that of sheer intelligence. The private sector has been evaluating prospective employees and candidates for promotion using emotional intelligence as a basis for the decision. It has led to the selection of more qualified candidates and has helped with employee retention. There is not nearly as much research on the public sector using emotional intelligence, but in a business where the major output is service to the community; wouldn't it be wise to consider it?

## **Literature Review**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) was brought to the forefront of the business world in the 1990's with the introduction of Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. Goleman believes that social and emotional skills can be of greater value to an employer than cognitive abilities. People with high EI are able to control their emotions, as well as others in order to achieve desired outcomes in emotionally charged situations. Goleman breaks EI into five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and effective relationships. The first three competencies deal with an intra-personal skillset whereas, the latter two deal with an inter-personal skillset. Through self-awareness, a person becomes aware of their emotional strengths and weaknesses and can recognize when their emotions can create discord. This is usually accomplished through an accurate self-assessment

and leads to an inner self-confidence. Self-management is the ability to regulate a person's feelings in order to have the ability to reason through a situation. This can be demonstrated by taking a normally stressful situation and turning it into a personally challenging one. Self-motivation is the concept of using the positive emotions to achieve goals and understanding what is out of a person's control. The letting go of negative emotions is a key to self-motivation. The last two competencies deal with how a person reacts to others. Empathy is the ability to recognize and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. With the use of empathy, a person can assist another in gaining a positive outlook on a situation. The last piece is creating effective relationships through collaboration and consensus-building. This gains support and buy-in for the desired goals and outcomes. When a person has these emotional and social abilities, they can sometimes achieve more than a person with cognitive skills (Goleman, 1995).

Building on the concepts that Goleman has set forth, James Kunnannatt breaks down EI into four concentrated areas for training purposes. These areas are self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and social influence. He states that the brain has a natural ability to cast doubt on reason through the use of emotion. With the aid of training, one can recognize when emotions are arising and starting to interfere with rational thought and take appropriate action to control them. It is through the exploration of these emotions, not the suppression, that understanding is gained and the ability to harness is achieved. Studies have shown that managers who are more adept in handling emotions often have more successes than those who ignore them (Emotional Intelligence: The next big HR investment, 2009).

With the influx of newer officers in the law enforcement field coming from Generation Y (Born 1980-2002), it is important to understand that they have different expectations in the workplace. They do not like to work with a lot of restrictions; they want to be involved in decision-making; they want ownership in their work; and they constantly want to learn. A characteristic of this generation is that they want to know the rationale for what they are doing, partly because they believe they might be able to do it better and more efficiently. People in leadership positions need to be able to fulfill these needs without reacting negatively to them. The ability to build effective relationships through collaboration and consensus building can help bridge the generational gaps and lead to a more productive environment (Phlunte', 2008).

Law enforcement has typically placed a rather large emphasis on technical competencies and ignored the emotional competencies when it comes to promotions throughout the ranks. With the challenges of managing a younger workforce with different expectations, the ability to lead was never more important. Leadership requires an emotional commitment from the workforce. A leader who has control of his/her emotions and uses them for positive outcomes can have a profound effect on the workforce. EI experts believe that the overwhelming majority of a leader's success is due to EI and the higher the rank, the greater degree of EI is required (Turner, 2006).

The strategic decision to consider EI during the hiring/promotional processes is increasingly being made by companies across the United States. One of the reasons for this is that a person with high EI has the ability to remain calm while under pressure. In a leadership setting, this calmness can influence others, thus keeping emotions at a level which enables the workforce to function. Another reason EI is being valued is that

a person with high EI is more effective in dealing with conflict resolution than a person with a low EI. They don't get stuck in the midst of the conflict; instead, they are able to progress through it to achieve the greater goals. The benefits of hiring/promoting a person who possesses a high EI are great, so it is ever more important to look for these qualities. Developing interviews that rely on the concepts contained in EI such as self-control, excellence, strategy, decision-making, communication, collaboration, and execution, can give a better insight into a person's EI and enable an organization to make better human relations decisions (Silliker, 2011).

Since EI tends to focus on relationships and interactions, it can be a great asset when it comes to conflict resolution. People who have a high EI tend to be flexible in how they handle conflicts. They can adapt and change tactics as the situation dictates, but usually rely heavily on collaboration. Additionally, the resolution takes into account the importance of relationships after the conflict is over, so a win-win situation is likely. People who have lower levels of competency in EI tend to rely on forcefulness or avoidance when dealing with conflict. As a result, the resolution or lack thereof typically has a negative effect on those involved. The good news is that training, especially coaching, seems to have positive effects on those who possess a low EI competency (Jordan & Troth, 2002).

There have been programs developed and researched which help individuals increase their EI. One program focused on a group of inmates who used psychodramatic role playing to analyze events in their lives. They were allowed to act out the events in order to understand how emotions played a role in the events and how the events affected others. Through the role-playing they were able to better understand how the emotions of the event affected their cognitive ability to handle the situation. The inmates who participated were less likely to have behavioral problems post-study. A program was later developed to train juvenile detention staff using a similar methodology. The staff was allowed to role-play common events in their daily activities which increased their empathy for the subject under their care and increased self-awareness for their own actions. After receiving the training, the staff reported better professional relationships with one another as well as those under their care. With this better understanding comes a decrease in conflict and the likelihood that the conflict that does arise is dealt with in a positive manner (Manzella & Bruce, 2003).

People working in the corrections field are subjected to a higher level of occupational stress than normal, which can have adverse effects on them. The more stress staff is under, the less likely it will be able to maintain an acceptable level of performance. Signs of stress include turnover, absenteeism, tardiness and decreased job satisfaction. The surprising result of research is that the stress is not coming from the direct interactions with the inmate population. The research tends to place a lot of responsibility on the supervision in the institutions. Job satisfaction can be greatly influenced by staff's perception of the supervision. Employees who feel empowered are more likely to report lower levels of occupation stress. Additionally, if they are included in decision-making and allowed to do their jobs freely, they also reported lower levels of stress. Emotional dissonance, which is when the employee feels differently than they are expected to feel, has been shown increase stress. This factor is a major cause of employee burnout or exhaustion. The importance of realizing the stressors in an already negative environment is great, and research shows that most stress is

generated by organizational issues. Any actions taken to correct these issues could positively influence staff (Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006).

## **Methods**

Based on the review of literature, a lot has been written about the benefits of emotional intelligence. The private sector has utilized this fairly new field to assist with personnel decisions for hiring and promotion. The research shows that emotional intelligence may be a better indicator of success than intelligence alone. The public sector, more specifically, corrections, has not been as quick to jump on the emotional intelligence bandwagon. An eleven question survey was created to gather information on whether or not emotional intelligence training would be beneficial to Orange County Corrections.

A link to the survey on Survey Monkey was sent via email to all employees (1607) of the Orange County Corrections Department. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. It was designed to gather demographic information pertaining to years of service, position in the organization, and whether or not the respondent was in a certified position. Additional questions were used to establish whether or not the department needed to consider emotional intelligence training. The results were filtered to target specific demographic areas where training would be most beneficial. It was reported that the survey vacillated between the terms argument and disagreement which may have led to confusion amongst the respondents. Also since this is a self-reporting survey and the questions could be considered to reflect negatively on the respondent, even with anonymity, the results could be lower than expected.

## **Results**

The survey was sent out to the 1607 employees who work at the Orange County Corrections Department. Out of the 1607 possible participants, 392 responded to the survey request for a response rate of 24.4%.

Question one was answered by 391 respondents for a response rate of 99.74%. Of those answering the question, 19.69% answered 5 and under, 26.85% 6-10, 20.46% 11-15, 8.44% 16-20, and 24.55% over 20 (figure 1).

Question 2 was also answered by 391 respondents for a response rate of 99.74%. There were 65.98% of the respondents claiming to be in a certified position while 34.02% reported a non-certified position (figure 2).

Question 3 was responded to by 389 people for a response rate of 99.23%. The responses showed 74.81% were line staff, 15.42% front-line supervisors, 7.97% middle management, and 1.80% upper management (figure 3).

Question 4 also had 389 people that answered for a response rate of 99.23%. The question was responded in the affirmative by 71.21% of those answering the question (figure 4).

Question 5 was answered by 315 respondents for a response rate of 80.36%. Respondents answered 2 or less at 76.51%, 3-4 at 14.92%, 5-6 at 2.86%, and 7 or more at 5.71% (figure 5).

Question 6 had 335 people respond for a response rate of 85.46%. The answer yes was chosen 31.94%, no 29.85%, and sometimes 38.21% (figure 6).

Question 7 was responded to by 330 people for a response rate of 84.18%. People responded yes at 27.27% and no 72.73% (figure 7).

The response rate for question 8 was 89.54% with 351 people responding. People chose the answer yes 63.53% of the time, no 14.25%, and sometimes 22.22% (figure 8).

Question 9 was answered by 362 people with a response rate of 92.35%. Yes was chosen by 32.04%, no by 40.06%, and sometimes by 27.90% (figure 9).

Question 10 had a response rate of 94.64%. Yes was chosen by 49.87%, no 21.29%, and maybe 28.84% (figure 10).

The last question had a response rate of 97.19%. Yes was chosen by 59.84%, no 15.75%, and maybe 24.41% (figure 11).

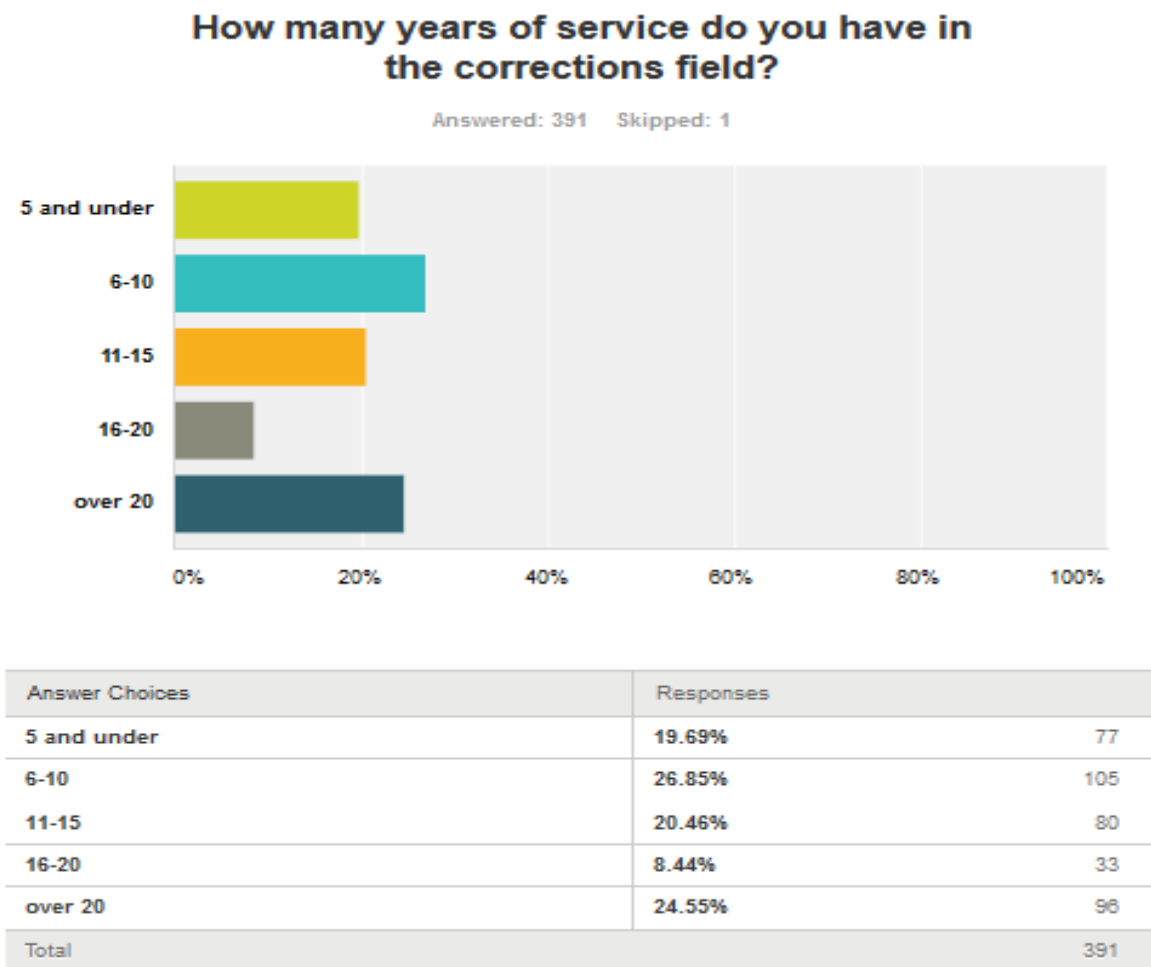
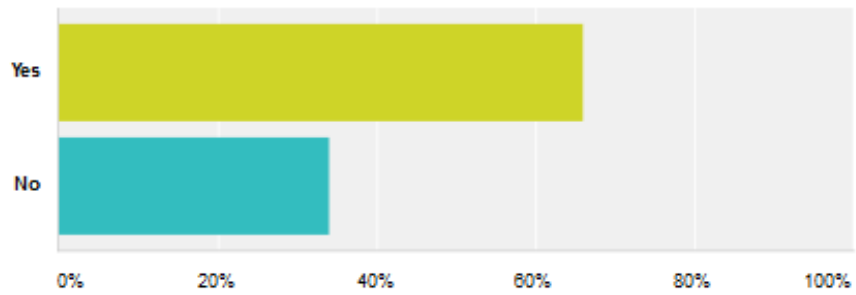


Figure 1

## Are you in a certified position

Answered: 391 Skipped: 1

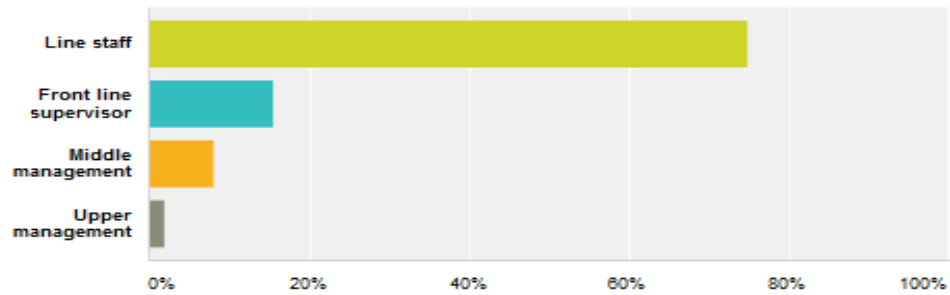


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	65.98% 258
No	34.02% 133
Total	391

Figure 2

## Which best describes the position you hold?

Answered: 389 Skipped: 3

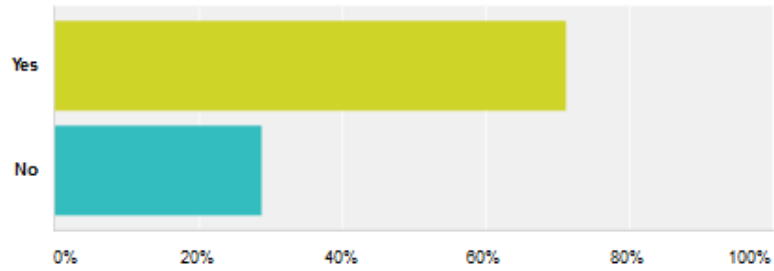


Answer Choices	Responses
Line staff	74.81% 291
Front line supervisor	15.42% 60
Middle management	7.97% 31
Upper management	1.80% 7
Total	389

Figure 3

**In the past year, have you had a verbal disagreement with someone you supervise (could be an inmate), a peer, or a supervisor at work?**

Answered: 389 Skipped: 3

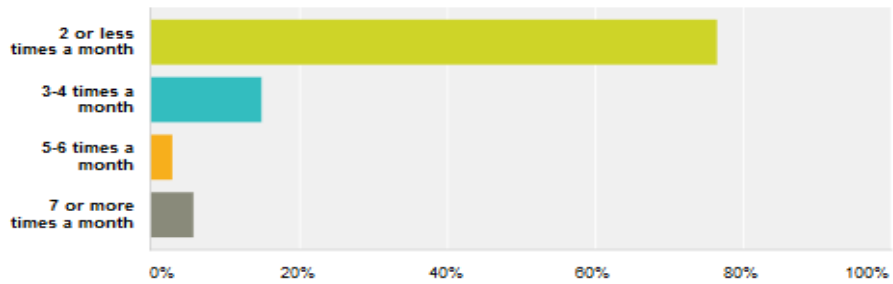


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	71.21%	277
No	28.79%	112
Total		389

Figure 4

**If so, how frequently do these disagreements occur?**

Answered: 315 Skipped: 77



Answer Choices	Responses	
2 or less times a month	76.51%	241
3-4 times a month	14.92%	47
5-6 times a month	2.86%	9
7 or more times a month	5.71%	18
Total		315

Figure 5

**During these disagreements, do you find that either you or the other people become emotionally involved in the argument?**

Answered: 335 Skipped: 57

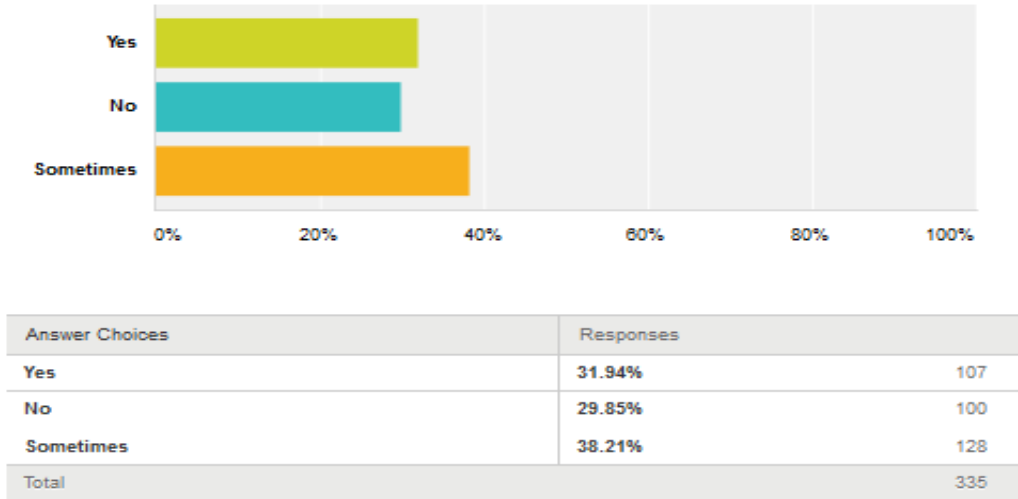


Figure 6

**After these disagreements, in retrospect, have you ever felt that you could have ended the argument sooner but didn't because you were upset?**

Answered: 330 Skipped: 62

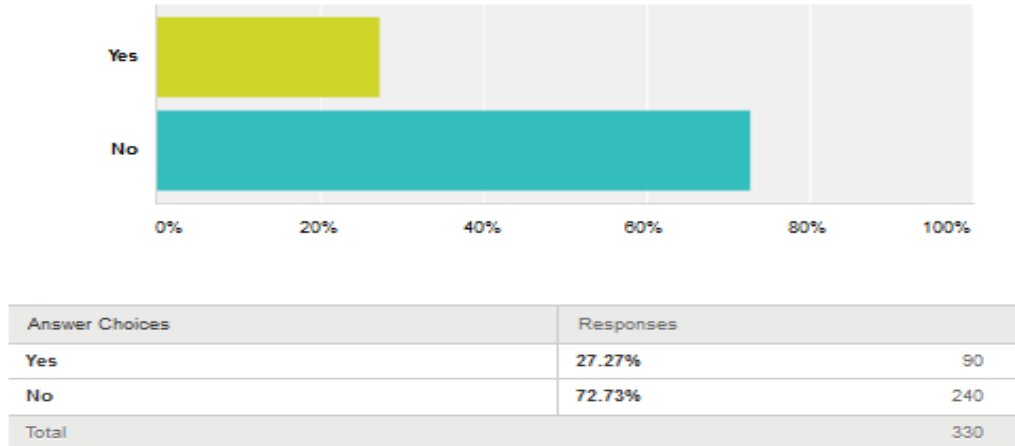
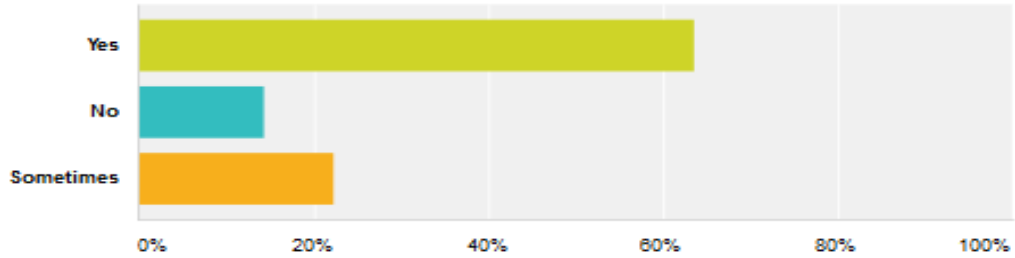


Figure 7



**Do you take into consideration the possible negative effects a disagreement can have on the relationship with the other person?**

Answered: 351 Skipped: 41

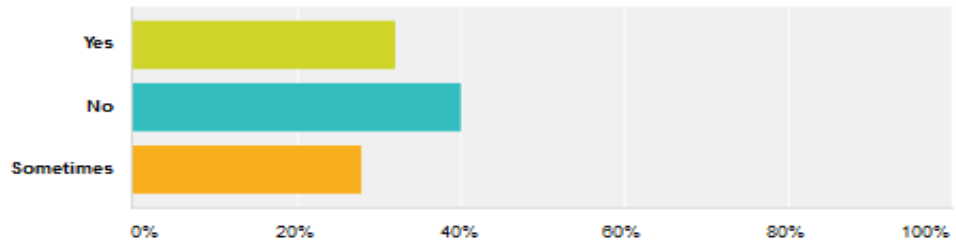


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	63.53% 223
No	14.25% 50
Sometimes	22.22% 78
Total	351

Figure 8

**Do you feel that disagreements in the past affect the ability to reach positive outcomes in the future?**

Answered: 362 Skipped: 30

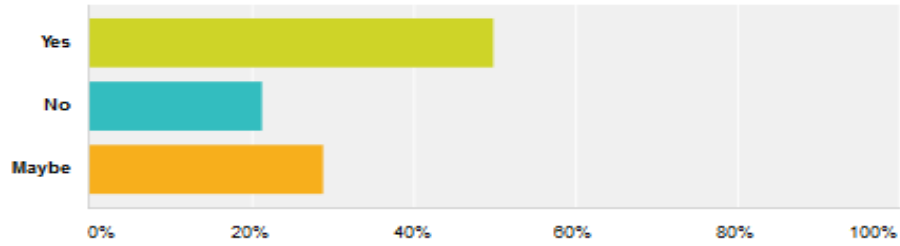


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	32.04% 116
No	40.06% 145
Sometimes	27.90% 101
Total	362

Figure 9

**Would you consider taking a training class that that would help you facilitate better resolutions to these arguments?**

Answered: 371 Skipped: 21

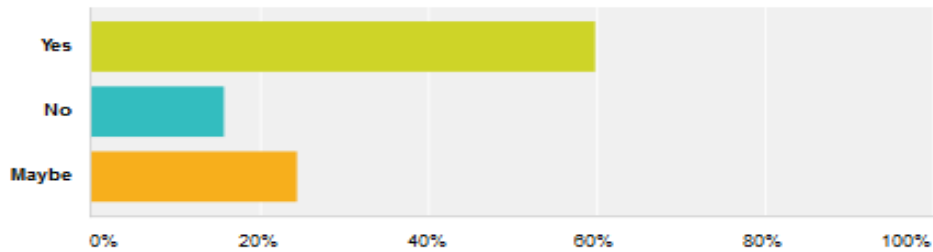


Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	49.87%	185
No	21.29%	79
Maybe	28.84%	107
Total		371

Figure 10

**Do you feel such a training class would make Orange County Corrections a better place to work?**

Answered: 381 Skipped: 11



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes	59.84%	228
No	15.75%	60
Maybe	24.41%	93
Total		381

Figure 11

## Discussion

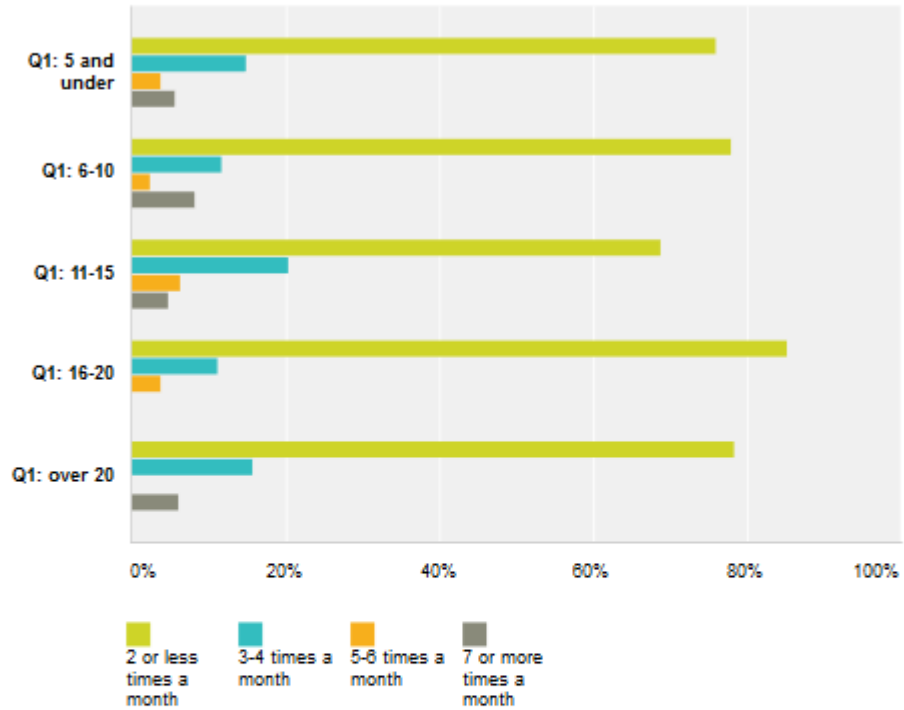
The data collected shows that over 70% of the respondents reported that they have had a verbal disagreement with someone at work within the past year (figure 4). In order to see how much conflict is occurring in the workplace the survey asked the respondents for the monthly frequency of these disagreements. The results show that almost a quarter of those surveyed reported having disagreements in the workplace on a near weekly basis or greater (figure 5). During the interpretation of the data, choices on the survey such as sometimes or maybe were counted as affirmative responses. During these disagreements, over 60% of the respondents report that there was emotional involvement on behalf of one or both of the involved parties (figure 6). In addition, 25% of the respondents report continuing a disagreement because they were upset (figure 7). The data shows that 85% of those surveyed realize that disagreements can affect future workplace relationships (figure 8) and almost 60% report that past disagreements hinder future positive outcomes (figure 9). The respondents also report at an 85% rate that they would consider taking a class on emotional intelligence and believe that this would make the department a better place to work (figures 10 & 11).

When looking at the numbers as a whole, it paints a broad picture that conflict in the workplace is a regular occurrence. When workers reported conflict, the majority of them noticed emotions within the disagreement. When one or more parties in a disagreement are emotionally involved, the ability to productively solve the disagreement is greatly diminished, therefore one could conclude that the majority of these disagreements do not get resolved productively. A surprising number of one quarter of the respondents admit continuing a disagreement because they were emotionally involved despite the overwhelming majority knowing that this can cause future repercussions. Additionally, the same overwhelming majority would consider emotional intelligence training. Generally, it appears that the respondents can recognize when emotions become involved in disagreements and the ramifications they might bring, but do not have the tools to stop it. Training to help one recognize their own emotional triggers as well as others should help reduce the frequency of disagreements with emotional involvement. Additional training to help one diffuse emotional charged situations should also reduce this frequency.

Prior to the survey, there were two assumptions that the survey was expected to prove as true. The first was that as time in service/age increased, there would be a reduction in emotional interactions. The second was that as rank increased, there would be a reduction in emotional interactions.

## If so, how frequently do these disagreements occur?

Answered: 314 Skipped: 77

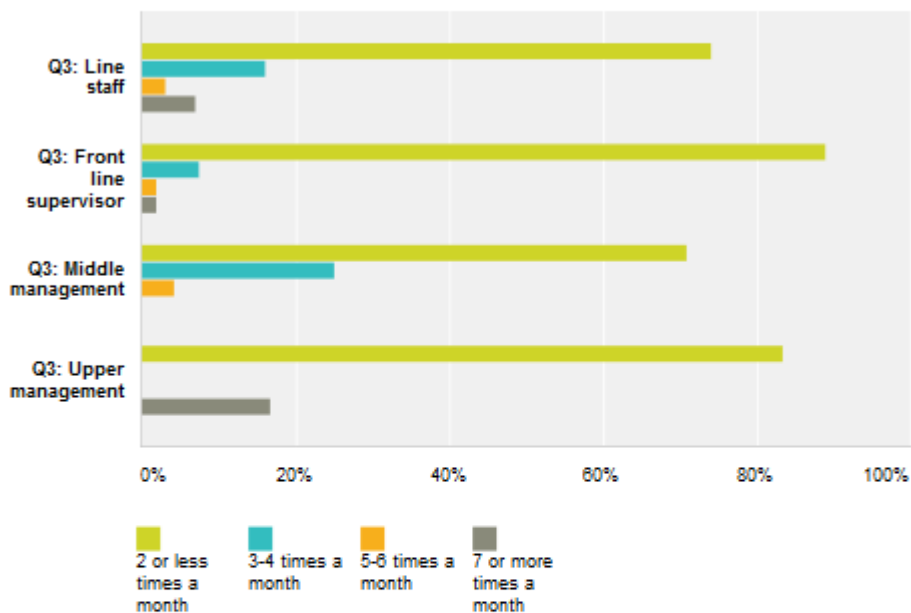


	Q1: 5 and under	Q1: 6-10	Q1: 11-15	Q1: 16-20	Q1: over 20	Total
2 or less times a month	17.08% 41	27.92% 67	18.33% 44	9.58% 23	27.08% 65	240
3-4 times a month	17.02% 8	21.28% 10	27.66% 13	6.38% 3	27.66% 13	47
5-6 times a month	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	11.11% 1	0% 0	9
7 or more times a month	16.67% 3	38.89% 7	16.67% 3	0% 0	27.78% 5	18
Total Respondents	54	86	64	27	83	314

Figure 12

### If so, how frequently do these disagreements occur?

Answered: 315 Skipped: 74



	Q3: Line staff	Q3: Front line supervisor	Q3: Middle management	Q3: Upper management	Total
2 or less times a month	70.95% 171	19.92% 48	7.05% 17	2.07% 5	241
3-4 times a month	78.72% 37	8.51% 4	12.77% 6	0% 0	47
5-6 times a month	77.78% 7	11.11% 1	11.11% 1	0% 0	9
7 or more times a month	88.89% 16	5.56% 1	0% 0	5.56% 1	18
Total Respondents	231	54	24	6	315

Figure 13

In figure 12, the data shows no correlation between time in service/age and a reduction in the frequency of emotional arguments in a month. In fact, by breaking into five year divisions, the distribution remains fairly similar in each division, thus negating the speculation that as time in service increases, the frequency of emotional arguments would decrease. Figure 13 compares rank with the frequency of emotional arguments. It also shows no direct correlation between having a higher rank and having fewer emotional interactions. Both assumptions made prior to the survey have been placed in doubt by the results of the survey.

While the results cannot definitively invalidate the previous assumptions, they are compelling enough to warrant a further look. Since no direct relationships appeared, it could be concluded that emotional intelligence is not something acquired over time nor is it acquired through the experience of promotion. The fact that there was no direct relationship between rank and a decrease in emotional arguments indicates that the present promotional system the department employs does not appear to place any weight on one's emotional intelligence. With emotional intelligence not appearing to be an acquired skill, it is important for the department to create and implement a recruiting, training and promotional strategy that places some emphasis on emotional intelligence.

Captain Vincent Abato has worked for the Orange County Corrections Department since 1990. He was promoted to corporal in 2001, sergeant in 2005, lieutenant in 2008 and captain in 2012. He is currently assigned to the Support Operations.

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## Appendix A

### SURVEY

The following survey is being conducted as a part of a research project required by the Senior Leadership Program. The results are confidential and will only be used for the purposes of the research project. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. How many years of service do you have in the corrections field?  
a. 5 and under b. 6-10 c. 11-15 d. 16-20 e. over 20
2. Are you in a certified position?  
a. yes b. no
3. Which best describes the position you hold?  
a. line staff b. front-line supervisor c. middle management  
d. upper management
4. In the past year, have you had a verbal disagreement with someone you supervise (could be an inmate), a peer, or a supervisor at work?  
a. yes b. no
5. If so, how frequently do these disagreements occur?  
a. 2 or less a month b. 3-4 a month c. 5-6 a month d. 7 or more a month
6. During these disagreements, do you find that either you or the other people become emotionally involved in the argument?  
a. yes b. no c. sometimes
7. After these disagreements, in retrospect, have you ever felt that you could have ended the argument sooner but didn't because you were upset?  
a. yes b. no
8. Do you take into consideration the possible negative effects a disagreement can have on the relationship with the other person?  
a. yes b. no c. sometimes
9. Do you feel that disagreements in the past affect the ability to reach positive outcomes in the future?  
a. yes b. no c. sometimes



10. Would you consider taking a training class that that would help you facilitate better resolutions to these arguments?

a. yes b. not c. maybe

11. Do you feel such a training class is needed?

a. yes b. no c. maybe