

1. Guilty or Not Guilty?

By Tony Burkin

When Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph started Netflix, they chose to have no workplace rules. Good people, they surmised, didn't need them. The more rules they needed the more flaws they had with their recruitment and selection process.

Recently Bill Boulding touched on the same idea. Writing in the Harvard Business Review (July 16, 2019) Boulding suggests everyone requires three qualities. Cognitive intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ) and decency intelligence (DQ). Put simply:

$$\text{Effectiveness} = \text{IQ} + \text{EQ} + \text{DQ}$$

This simple formula applies to everyone in all situations - parenting, being a road user, neighbour, customer, teacher, leader.

The implication is possession of both high IQ and high EQ does not mean we always do decent things.

Take EQ. During a challenging but much needed conversation with a colleague we may be able to see the adverse impact we are having on them. We can put names to the emotions our colleague is showing. We predict by carrying on in the manner we are it's likely our colleague will end up in tears. We know they've got the message and the case for continuing the conversation is diminishing. What do we do? Continue *leaning in* or start *leaning out*? We decide to continue leaning in and within minutes we're offering our colleague tissues. Whilst we may have high IQ and EQ (we have successfully identified and predicted

the outcome) our decency quotient is low. Decent people don't do these things.

Working alongside school leadership teams we find the following are regular discussion points:

- *Demanding parents with unrealistic expectations;*
- *Avoiding honest conversations with colleagues to the detriment of student learning;*
- *Too easily accepting second-best of colleagues for the sake of avoiding a potential clash;*
- *Turning a blind eye to bad student behaviour in the playground because the student is not in your immediate area of personal responsibility;*
- *When straightforwardness is required important messages are sugar-coated, watered down and masked;*
- *Communicating what others want to hear as opposed to what they need to hear - and ending up over-promising and under-delivering;*
- *Missing a deadline without giving advanced warning;*
- *Making it difficult for colleagues to give honest feedback because we become emotional, take things personally, hold grudges and catastrophise;*
- *Agreeing to commit to a team decision but communicating to non-team members afterwards your ambivalence or worse, disowning the decision;*
- *Complaining about colleagues to others behind their backs;*
- *Letting colleagues down and making their lives difficult by failing to make an agreed upon and important transition when teaching in a shared learning space.*

Dollops of indecency lie at the heart of these situations. People acting decently wouldn't do these things (our **Book Review** in this issue touches on why decent people do indecent things at work).

Another way of framing decency is to think of it as professionalism. In New Zealand the Education Council, working with the teaching profession, recently finalised the **Code of Professional Responsibility** (<https://teachingcouncil.nz/sites/default/files/Cod e%20Guidance%20FINAL.pdf>).

The code outlines a set of behaviours which so long as they can be abided by, educators will demonstrate high professional decency quotients.

Thinking of traditional appraisal, it becomes possible to understand why it has failed to engage the profession. Take the following scenario.

It's early in the year and a teacher is outlining for their appraiser their goals. They will soon be discussing lesson observations.

In the back of the appraiser's head is the knowledge the teacher is in possession of high DQ. The appraiser knows this because over the last 7 years this teacher has consistently demonstrated high to solid quality teaching practice. This teacher tries to adapt their practice as and where needed and like most teachers, they succeed and fail along the way.

In mid-February the appraiser knows, come December, the teacher will be competent; they can predict with certainty their colleague will have met every standard and done their best to ensure their students achieve. And the teacher knows it too.

Both are wondering why they are doing what they are doing but neither poses that question to the other.

This scenario is played out thousands of times across the country year after year.

In civilised (decent) societies one is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Conventional teacher appraisal systems have worked on the opposite premise. It seems teachers are assumed incompetent and have a year to prove competency.

Systems built on deficit-based thinking can quickly turn decent people into cynics, recalcitrants and sceptics.

Since the inception of appraisal in the late 1990's we have witnessed in our work how many decent people can rapidly become indecent when the word *appraisal* enters a conversation. These are triggers, instantly raising the heckles of many decent people.

Rethinking appraisal is more than developing a system. One starting point is transforming teachers' mind-sets and changing thinking. When teachers have been exposed to an indecent approach this will be challenging work.

A useful starting point is to think about what guiding foundation principles a new approach to appraisal might be based. Assuming teacher competence until evidence suggests otherwise will be important. A commitment to this also meets the needs of the vast majority of the profession.