

**An Introduction to  
Relationship Systems Intelligence™  
Advanced Coaching for Individuals, Groups & Organizations**

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## INTRODUCTION

No matter what kind of work you do, you (and your clients or employees) are always in relationship. Companies work with a bewildering array of: top up and top down report, cross departmental communication, client contacts, team interactions, colleague collaboration, etc. All those contacts hinge on good relationship skills to be successful. Your clients/employees are also affected by family pressures, community and social interactions. Research has conclusively found that while IQ is the best indicator for educational status, Emotional Social Intelligence (a key component of Relationship Systems Intelligence™) seems to be the best determinant of one's level of achievement and success in most professions and in marriage; (Goleman 2006, Shoda, Mishel, & Peake 1990, Durlak & Weissberg 2007, Gottman 2002).

Do your clients or organizations struggle with any of the following, either personally or in their teams?

- Poor or toxic communication patterns
- Ineffective or confusing communication
- Unproductive or low team morale or low positivity
- Conflict avoidance or poor conflict resolution
- Low creativity, productivity or team synergy
- Role confusion or poorly occupied roles

These are just some of the ways that poor Relationship Systems Intelligence™ can show up in individuals, teams and organizations. Fortunately, research indicates that Relationship Intelligence can be learned (Durlak & Weissberg 2007).

## WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS INTELLIGENCE™ (RSI)?

Relationship Systems Intelligence™ (RSI) includes and transcends Emotional Social Intelligence (ESI) pioneered by Daniel Goleman and others. RSI starts with an understanding of oneself, (Emotional Intelligence) moves on to include an understanding of other's emotional experience (Social Intelligence) and culminates with the ability to identify with and collaborate with groups, teams, communities and other social systems (Relationship Systems Intelligence™). It is this final evolution, RSI, which catalyzes the capacity of teams and groups to move beyond the personal to a powerfully generative group identity. Individuals and organizations vary in their level of RSI. Some may need to work on strengthening Emotional Intelligence, others may need training in Social Intelligence and more advanced clients are ready to work with Relationship Systems intelligence™. Together the three forms of Intelligence create flexible, resilient individuals and teams. Below, we will talk more about the different kinds of "Intelligences" which make up Relationship Systems Intelligence™.

### Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional Intelligence works with an individual's ability to access, express, and use emotions in a productive way. It involves emotional self-awareness and the capacity to manage or leverage feelings by channeling them appropriately toward goals. It also addresses the ability to motivate oneself, suppress impulses and delay gratification in service of the achievement of goals.

When a person has good Emotional Intelligence, he or she can skillfully work with their internal experience. A CEO with low EQ may be unaware of emotions, unable to express them appropriately or

be “high jacked” by them. This may lead to unconscious behaviors, avoidance of emotional issues, emotional blow ups etc. Below are a few examples of the kinds of clients who would benefit from training in Emotional Intelligence.

Joe is a dedicated manager who has trouble handling conflict. Typically he avoids confrontation until he can no longer contain it and then he blows up.

Louise is a competent CEO but she tends to be critical and “burns through” assistants, who quit after 6 months because of her driving and unsupportive style.

Carlos cares about his staff but is embarrassed by “touchy feely stuff” so he rarely acknowledges his employees. Staff feels he is unappreciative and emotionally disengaged.

## Social Intelligence

Social Intelligence builds upon Emotional Intelligence. It is the capacity to accurately identify others’ emotions, empathize with them, and to see things from another person’s perspective. It is the ability to leverage that awareness in an effective way to cooperate in the pursuit of goals and the creation of positive relationships.

An important aspect of Social Intelligence is accurately identifying the emotions of others, rather than making up what you think they feel. There is a risk of projecting one’s own emotions onto someone else rather than inquiring and listening openly to their perspective. A CEO with good Social Intelligence is able to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, see past their surface behaviors to underlying motivations and skillfully bring out the best in others.

Both Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence are often combined in what is now called ESI or Emotional Social Intelligence. Teams are strongly affected by the team leader’s ESI. Teams in organizations led by leaders who have low ESI are undermined, misdirected and deprived of the resources and authority they need to do the task at hand. (Hughes and Terrell 2007)

Below are examples of leaders who would benefit from training Social Intelligence.

Michael tries to help Gita by pointing out the places where she fails, which just shakes her confidence. He doesn’t know that Gita would respond much better to appreciation of what she does right, followed by a supportive redirect on what needs to change.

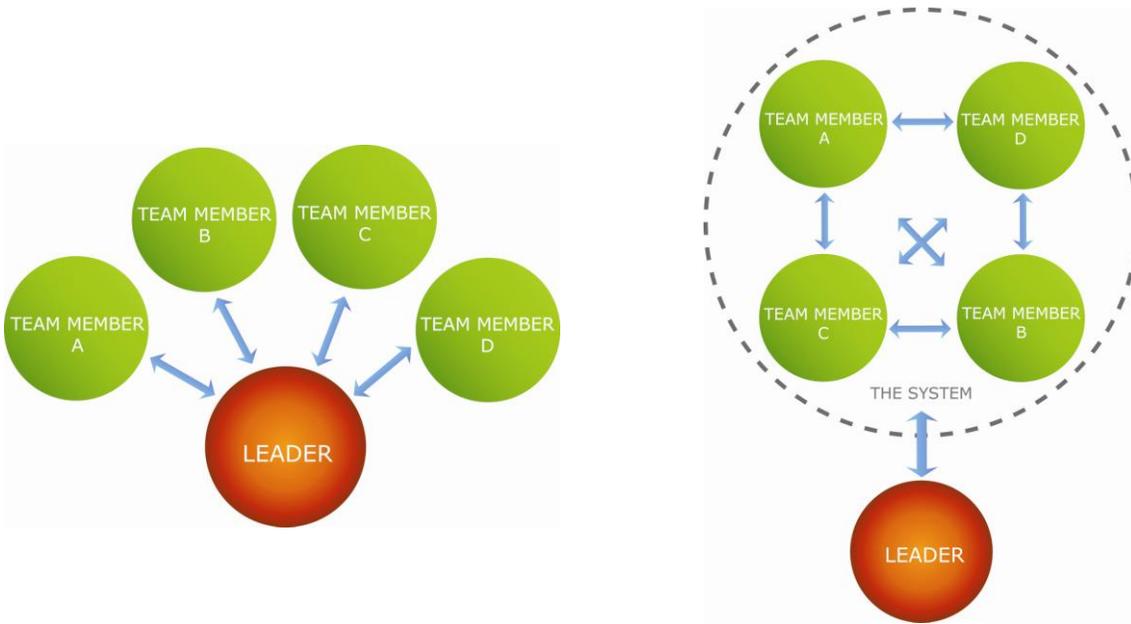
Susan is frustrated by Mark who is constantly late in getting his projects in to her. She writes him off as “lazy” and feels he is trying to make her look bad. Instead of asking him what’s going on, she avoids him. What she doesn’t know is that Mark just got a life threatening diagnosis and is struggling with depression.

Christina is a good researcher but is rigid in her thinking. She has trouble in the multidisciplinary teams she is part of because she is not open to new ideas.

## RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS INTELLIGENCE™ (RSI) - RELATING TO THE WHOLE

Relationship Systems Intelligence™ incorporates Emotional and Social Intelligence and then expands the focus to a larger paradigm, the capacity to see oneself as part of a Relationship System. A Relationship System is an interdependent group of people with common identity or function. Identifying with and aligning with a system is a holonic shift up from simply connecting effectively others. It is the difference between relating with bunch of individuals in a group, to seeing the group as a single integrated whole.

We have all had an experience on a sports team, with a choral group or on a project team where individual egos were melded into something much greater and true creative synergy occurs. That



“being in the zone together” is the experience of Systems Intelligence.

Here are some of the key components of RSI:

- RSI is the ability to maximize one’s relationship with a group, team or system and to relate to it as a whole. Teams with higher RSI are more productive and report greater team cohesion and satisfaction than teams with lower RSI. (Offerman, Bailey et al 2004)
- RSI involves the ability to move from seeing a group of individuals to seeing the system itself, as a living breathing entity. We call this the Third Entity™.
- Conflict is not seen as a problem, but is seen as a signal that change is needed in the system. Conflict is handled skillfully as a midwife to constructive change. It’s not about “who is doing what to whom; it’s about what is trying to happen.”
- RSI includes the ability to read the emotional field of the system and accurately identify the emotional climate in a given situation. Once the system is revealed to itself it can begin to self-correct.
- RSI requires deep democracy (Arnold Mindell 2002). Deep democracy is the practice of recognizing that all voices in a relationship system need to be heard – including the unpopular ones – as they are a part of the knowledge pool of the system. Every voice carries data, information and wisdom in some way for that system. People with high RSI seek out multiple inputs from the system and are not threatened by differences, (think of Barack Obama and his cabinet).

- Everyone is a voice of the system. The ability to shift from a personal perspective (“it’s Larry’s opinion”) to a systems perspective (“Larry is expressing something that lives in the system and it’s not personal”) is a cornerstone of high Relationship Systems Intelligence™.
- An overview of Relationship Systems Intelligence™ would be that it’s not about “me”, and it’s not about “me and you”, it’s about “us” in this system and what is trying to happen.

Below are some examples of leaders who would benefit from training in Relationship Systems Intelligence™.

Jose is a new CEO frustrated by the poor morale on his management team. He knows there is something “off” about their interactions together but he doesn’t know what. He doesn’t know how to create an atmosphere where the team feels free to tell him what is going on for them.

The blue team is dominated by a few verbal individuals who do all the talking. Other team members have valuable insights but fail to speak up.

There is hostile gossip circulating in the organization, but no one is speaking directly to the rumors.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS INTELLIGENCE™

Some of the fundamental systemic insights and behaviors in Relationship Systems Intelligence™ include having crucial conversations, building powerful dialogue, and avoiding toxic communication styles.

### Key Dialogue Components

Individuals who work best with systems are those who can master crucial conversations with the team, group or system. (Patterson, Grenny et al 2002) Indeed, research found that when crucial conversations occurred, that created real dialogue, the entire emotional intelligence of the group increased.

These ongoing crucial conversations and dialogues create a pool of shared meaning. As individuals are exposed to more accurate and relevant information, they make better choices and decisions. And not only do they make better choices, but since the meaning is shared, people are more willing to act on whatever decisions they make. Quite simply, there is more buy-in.

Unfortunately, in many systems people don’t openly share ideas or information and it begs the question, “What stops people from sharing information?” There are many reasons, and here are just a few:

- When one party dominates a conversation
- Inhibitions that stem from an expectation of looking foolish
- Some cultural considerations inhibit expansive sharing
- An environment where sharing information is simply not safe

When these are overcome, however, a free flow of dialogue and meaning can begin to flow between people. Each of us enters conversations with our own ideas, theories and feelings that make up our personal pool of meaning. When we are skillful at dialogue, we can make it safe for others to add their meaning to the shared pool of knowledge while we can also add ours. Even very different, difficult and controversial dialogue has room in this environment.

## Behaviors That Build RSI

Building RSI doesn't have to be difficult; however it does require practice and the ability to truly hold the perspective of the system, team or group. Some of the behaviors that support these dialogues, and that are central to RSI are:

1. Practicing Deep Democracy where all voices in a system are heard and honored, including the unpopular ones.
2. Practicing Appreciative Inquiry where one builds on ideas after appreciating what was said by the other parties.
3. Increasing positivity on a team until there is a 5:1 ratio of positive-to--negative interactions (Gottman 2002).
4. Decreasing negative interactions with softer start ups in difficult conversations and both understanding and using repair bids (Gottman 2002).
5. Increasing positivity during conflict so that a lighter field is held, even during serious or difficult conversations.
6. Avoiding toxic communication styles including: blaming, defensiveness, stonewalling, contempt and controlling (Gottman 2002).

For each of these items, simple awareness goes a long way to create a shift. However, there are tools and approaches that can be used in every case. This primer serves as merely an opening conversation in the ongoing dialogue around harnessing the capacity of groups, organizations and individuals.

## ABOUT CRR GLOBAL

CRR Global has been creating excellence in relationships of all kinds for 15 years and our mission is to “inspire and equip change agents who work with relationship systems.” CRR Global’s expertise is the creation of practical tools that increase emotional, social and systems intelligence. If you are a change agent who would like to learn more about CRR Global or about our training program, Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching™, please visit our website at [www.crrglobal.com](http://www.crrglobal.com), or call 866 435 5939.

Faith Fuller PhD, PCC, ORSCC and Marita Fridjhon MSW, PCC, ORSCC are co--directors of CRR Global and authors of the Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching™ Program. They have over twenty years of working with relationship systems including teams, organizations, families, and community groups. Their training program is designed to foster excellence in relationships of all kinds. It’s useful to remember that we are always in relationship. Faith and Marita believe that we are only beginning to uncover the power and potential inherent in successful relationships.

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