



IoH Broadsheet

The Institute of Hospitality Broadsheet is a thought-leadership article written by a Member or Fellow of the Institute. Celebrating the wealth of professionalism, knowledge and expertise within our diverse, worldwide hospitality family, the IoH Broadsheet is published exclusively for members.

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in the Age of AI in Hospitality

Sara Bennett MIH is Managing Director of The Daisy Gray Partnership, a training consultancy and originator of the Elements 360 self-awareness tool. Although The Daisy Gray Partnership works globally across multiple sectors, Sara's love of hospitality brings her back to the industry time and again. As a Member of the IoH, she has been proud to mentor young professionals and support the industry wherever she is needed.

In this month's Broadsheet, she explores the importance of emotional intelligence (EI or EQ) in hospitality alongside the rise of artificial intelligence, emphasising the value of empathy and authentic communication in leadership.



Balancing Technology With The Human Touch

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming industries, including hospitality. Automated systems, chatbots, data analytics and AI-generated marketing have streamlined operations, enhanced customer experiences and reduced costs.

While we can benefit from adopting these new tools, the distinctly human quality of emotional intelligence has never been more important. EQ fosters human connection and personalises service in ways that AI alone cannot replicate.

The Role of AI in Hospitality Leadership

As leaders and team members, we can use AI for many regular, repetitive tasks. Examples include recruitment, onboarding, performance management, time and resource management, project planning and scheduling.

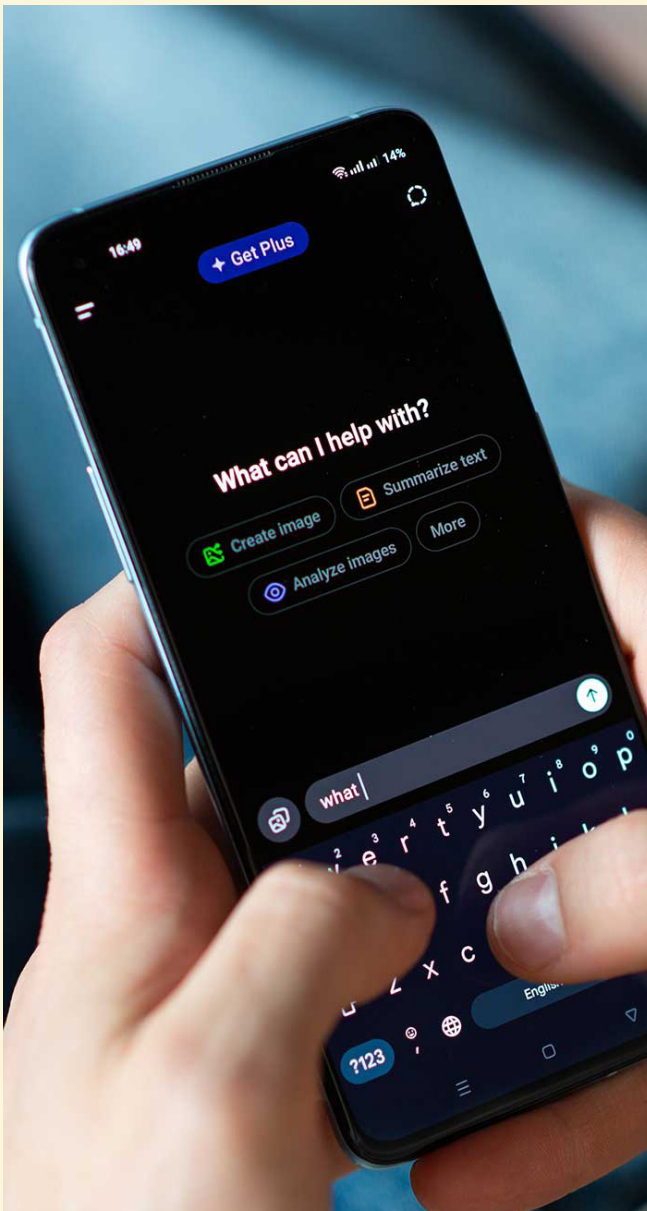
AI can also help us write SMART goals, prepare presentations or create SOPs. It can save time and be especially helpful for anyone who finds the written word difficult or onerous.

From the perspective of the people in your care, however, there are important considerations.

Engagement and Job Security

One of the primary concerns about AI among hospitality teams is job security. The increasing use of technologies such as automated check-ins, chatbots, mobile ordering in restaurants and even room-service robots can create uncertainty about job stability.

Hospitality is inherently people-centred. Reducing human interaction through AI implementation can detract from the personalised guest experience, while team members may feel that their roles are being diminished. This could lead to lower job satisfaction and engagement, not just in their individual roles, but in the hospitality industry as a whole.



Losing Personal Connection

AI systems, while efficient, do not possess the emotional intelligence that people bring to the table.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman identified five key elements:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills

When we do not harness the power of our humanity, we miss a significant opportunity to communicate with empathy, compassion and authenticity.

We are emotional beings, and we need emotional intelligence. If we described a leader as inauthentic or artificial, it would not be a compliment. The word artificial has historically applied to something made in imitation of, or as a substitute for, what is natural.

The absence of personal connection can make all of us feel underappreciated and overlooked, and that affects our overall engagement and morale.

Non-verbal communication is one reason personal connection matters. Written words can be misinterpreted, and spoken words can lose meaning when tone and expression do not support them. We have deeply ingrained instincts that help us read one another.

Albert Mehrabian famously said that communication was delivered as follows.

- 7% Words
- 38% Tone of Voice
- 55% Body Language / Facial Expression

However, his findings related specifically to the communication of feelings and attitudes when verbal and non-verbal signals were inconsistent. They should not be taken to mean that words account for only 7% of all communication.

The wider lesson remains useful for hospitality leaders: people respond not only to what we say, but also to how we say it. Tone, expression and body language can reinforce our words—or undermine them.

AI is beginning to replicate some emotional cues in an effort to make interactions feel more natural.

However, our desire for authentic emotional connection cannot be fully replaced. Human connection is something we seek when we need comfort, understanding and company.

Maintaining The Balance

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 highlights resilience, flexibility and agility, leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning among the skills employers increasingly value.

These skills remain critical for leaders who want to progress in their careers. The important question is: what is emotional intelligence, and how can I build my EQ skills?

To harness the full potential of EQ in the age of AI, hospitality organisations could invest in structured learning and development.

Understanding EQ and developing self-awareness, emotional management, empathy and interpersonal skills can change the way we interact with one another. This can enhance the guest experience and strengthen the service chain through improved performance and a can-do mentality.

Teams should also learn how to use AI tools effectively to complement their roles. A well-trained team that understands the balance between technology and human interaction is better equipped to deliver exceptional service.

Conclusion

As hospitality continues to embrace AI, the importance of EQ cannot be overstated.

While AI enhances efficiency and provides valuable insights, EQ helps ensure that guests and colleagues receive personalised, empathetic and memorable experiences.

The successful integration of AI and EQ creates a balance that benefits both guests and hospitality professionals. As technology continues to evolve, the human touch remains irreplaceable, making emotional intelligence a cornerstone of excellence in hospitality.

Let's use AI as the tool it was designed to be—not as an imitation of, or substitute for, our humanity.



References and Resources

The following resources provide further insight into emotional intelligence, communication and the role of AI in hospitality:

- Emotional Intelligence – Author: Daniel Goleman <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Emotional-Intelligence-Matter-More-Than/dp/0747528306>
- Inference of attitudes from nonverbal communication in two channels – Author: Albert Mehrabian <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/6046577/>
- World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>
- The Squiggly Career – Author: Helen Tupper & Sarah Ellis <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/312993/the-squiggly-career-by-ellis-helen-tupper-and-sarah/9780241385845>
- IoH Fellows Broadsheet: The Role of Artificial Intelligence – AI, machine learning and generative AI in hospitality. <https://www.instituteofhospitality.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/fellows-broadsheet-July-2023-Role-of-Artificial-Intelligence-Monica-Or-FIH-final.pdf>
- IoH Above & Beyond white paper: AI, But Not as We Know It – the opportunities, limitations and human dimension of AI. <https://www.instituteofhospitality.org/above-beyond-white-paper-ai/>

About the Author

Sara has had what authors Helen Tupper and Sarah Ellis call a 'squiggly career', beginning in hospitality before moving into insurance, finance and retail, and ultimately returning to hospitality.

As a proud member of the Institute, Sara is Managing Director of The Daisy Gray Partnership, which provides learning events and coaching across sectors.

Working across the UK, the Channel Islands and Southeast Asia, and in multiple sectors, has given Sara first-hand experience of shifting cultures, politics and priorities, with people as the enduring common theme. Through these years of experience, she has learned that people are people wherever they are and whatever work they do—and that developing greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence can support successful careers and happier lives.

Hospitality remains at the heart of Sara's work and life, inspiring her commitment to care, comfort and memorable experiences.

Free offer for IoH Members

Complimentary access to the 'Elements 360' self-awareness tool. Contact Sara, mention the Broadsheet article and confirm you are an IoH member.



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