

# Emotional intelligence: A valuable leadership trait

When it comes to safety people usually think about controlling hazards or other technical skills needed to prevent injuries. However, many researchers believe that emotional intelligence also plays an important role in the workplace and impacts everything from safety to overall workplace success. But what is it?

## What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence was introduced by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, but the idea really took off with Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, which was published in 1995. It's the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions as well as be able to recognize and respond to and even impact the emotions of others.

There are several views on the value of emotional intelligence in all jobs, but most researchers believe that leaders must have well-developed interpersonal skills to effectively manage others' work.

## The five principles of emotional intelligence

According to Daniel Goleman, these are the five key principles of emotional intelligence:



**Self-awareness** - being able to recognize your own emotions, triggers to emotions, and how your emotions can impact others



**Empathy** - seeing the world through others' eyes, it is also the ability to recognize, understand, and experience others' feelings



**Self-regulation** - being able to control your emotions and moods so they don't lead to negative consequences



**Social skills** - being able to find common ground and build rapport with others through positive interactions and building networks



**Motivation** - intrinsic motivation, or a natural optimism and desire to achieve not related to external rewards

We all know people who seem to come by these skills naturally, like they were born with it. While some researchers believe that to be true, others believe these soft skills can be improved with practice.

## How can you improve emotional intelligence?

There are several strategies to improve emotional intelligence starting with practice, practice, and more practice. Changes to soft skills don't happen quickly, and communication breakdowns will still occur, but you can work to make them less likely to happen. Here's a few ideas:

- 1. Be self-reflective.** Spend some time thinking about how you feel and why. Not only will it help you with recognizing your emotions, but it may put you in touch with emotional triggers, so you can learn how to manage them in the future.
- 2. Talk with an observer.** Getting another perspective can be very valuable. When we are in the grips of our own emotions, it can blind us to what's happening. Speaking with someone who observed how you reacted in a certain situation can provide you with important insight into how you appear to others. That's advice you can use if you want to change how others perceive you for the better.

**3. Practice humility.** Look at what motivates you. Are you driven by ambition and seeking accomplishments? Being emotionally intelligent means giving others a chance to contribute to the mission. Some people mistakenly think this doesn't promote self-confidence, but it's the opposite. When you are less concerned about getting credit, you project a quiet confidence and humility that is indicative of a leader.

**4. Apologize when needed.** If you make a mistake, take responsibility for it and apologize directly to those impacted. This will improve work relationships and lead to better emotional intelligence.

It won't happen overnight, but practicing can lead to better workplace relationships that can make you a more effective leader.

### What does low emotional intelligence look like?

Leaders with low levels of emotional intelligence can have a real negative impact on the teams they lead. They may experience more workplace injuries, lower levels of productivity, and higher turnover. Here are a few signs of low emotional intelligence:

- Unable to admit they made a mistake
- Blaming others when things go wrong
- Critical of others' mistakes
- Unwilling to take feedback
- Not open to other opinions
- Communicate aggressively or with passive-aggression
- Don't integrate with the team

## 9 ways to spot EQ leadership

A leader with a high EQ can:



### Activity ideas

- Discuss the five principles of emotional intelligence. Do you have examples of these in your workplace?
- Form a book group to read a book on emotional intelligence.
- Consider taking an emotional intelligence assessment. A self-assessment is a good place to start and may provide insight into your emotional intelligence. Reflect on your scores and think about ways to improve.