

Emotional Intelligence – The Hard Truth About Soft Skills

By Kim Freedman

According to an article published in the July 2005 issue of CIO magazine, the primary cause of leadership failure in technical organizations is poor interpersonal skills. Talented technicians are often promoted into leadership positions without much thought as to their readiness or suitability for leading people. Unfortunately, many of these managers fail to reach their potential due to underdeveloped soft skills.

To advance in technical organizations (for example, engineering, information technology, finance), proficient technical skills are 'table stakes.' However, technical skills alone will not take you to the top of the career ladder. The highest performing leaders possess Emotional Intelligence, a term popularized by Daniel Goleman in this book for the same name. He defined emotional intelligence as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."

In the cover story of the April 2007 issue of PM Network magazine entitled *Beyond the Hype*, the author recommends that you take an emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) assessment to "get a base reading." Generally, this type of assessment measures your current level of awareness, your skills and competencies, and how you view the world and what you value within it. I use the word 'generally' because there are over 60 different emotional intelligence inventories and assessments currently available. Not surprisingly, most busy professionals prefer assessments that can be taken online in fewer than 15 minutes.

Regardless of the EQ measurement instrument you select, the assessment results can help you target one or more areas for development and improvement. And, here's the great news—almost everyone can increase their level of emotional intelligence. The assessment delivers the first step, which is awareness. One you are aware, you choose to change—or not.

Let's say that you want to improve your social competence by becoming a more active listener. Here is an example of a step-by-step change process:

1. Begin by picking one behavior or habit that you believe may be getting in your way: *"I could really be a better listener."*
2. Declare that you want to improve in that specific area and establish a goal: *"I want to practice active listening in 70% of my conversations at work and at home."*

3. Tell at least one other person of your intent to improve in the selected area:
"I've decided that I want to become a better, more active listener."
4. Ask that person and others for their support, feedback, and suggestions: *"Do you have any suggestions that might help me in achieving my goal?"*
5. Look for opportunities to practice the new behavior... and actually do it!
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 until the more new and improved behavior becomes a habit.

I've seen this 6-step process produce positive results time and time again. Why is it so effective? Because whenever you declare a specific intention to someone else, you feel more accountable to follow through and do what you say you are going to do. Asking for suggestions and support from other people reinforces that intention and sense of accountability. As you listen to what others have to say, you become more self-aware and gain a better understanding of the impact your behavior is having on others. And finally, the built-in feedback loop will let you know when you have met your goal.

Pick a behavior or habit you would like to change and give this process a try. For more information about emotional intelligence and soft skill development, contact me through my website: www.catalystleadershipcoaching.com.

Kim Freedman, President of [Catalyst Leadership Coaching, LLC](http://www.catalystleadershipcoaching.com), uses customized training programs and one-on-one coaching to help businesses develop effective leaders and productive teams. She also offers personal coaching to professionals who want to achieve their goals and have more time, energy, and money in the process.