

9 Habits of Highly Emotionally Intelligent People

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

When emotional intelligence first appeared to the masses, it served as the missing link in a peculiar finding: people with average IQs outperform those with the highest IQs 70% of the time. This anomaly threw a massive wrench into what many people had always assumed was the sole source of success—IQ. Decades of research now point to emotional intelligence as the critical factor that sets star performers apart from the rest of the pack.

How much of an impact does emotional intelligence (EQ) have on your professional success? The short answer is: a lot! It's a powerful way to focus your energy in one direction with a tremendous result. Of all the people we've studied at work, we've found that 90% of top performers have high EQs. You can be a top performer without emotional intelligence, but the chances are slim.

Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results. Emotional intelligence is made up of four core skills that pair up under two primary competencies: personal competence and social competence.



Personal competence comprises your self-awareness and self-management skills, which focus more on you individually than on your interactions with other people. Personal competence is your ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies.

- **Self-Awareness** is your ability to accurately perceive your emotions and stay aware of them as they happen.
- **Self-Management** is your ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and positively direct your behavior.

Social competence is made up of your social awareness and relationship management skills; social competence is your ability to understand other people's moods, behavior, and motives in order to respond effectively and improve the quality of your relationships.

- **Social Awareness** is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people and understand what is really going on.
- **Relationship Management** is your ability to use awareness of your emotions and the others' emotions to manage interactions successfully.

Despite the significance of emotional intelligence, its intangible nature makes it very difficult to know which behaviors you should emulate. So I've analyzed the data from the million-plus people TalentSmart has tested in order to identify the habits that set high-EQ people apart.

1. They're relentlessly positive. Keep your eyes on the news for any length of time, and you'll see that it's just one endless cycle of war, violent attacks,



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fragile economies, failing companies, and environmental disasters. It's easy to think the world is headed downhill fast. And who knows? Maybe it is. But emotionally intelligent people don't worry about that because they don't get caught up in things they can't control. They focus their energy on directing the two things that are completely within their power—their attention and their effort. Numerous studies have shown that optimists are physically and psychologically healthier than pessimists. They also perform better at work. Remind yourself of this the next time a negative train of thought takes hold of you.

2. They have a robust emotional vocabulary. All people experience emotions, but it is a select few who can accurately identify them as they occur. Our research shows that only 36% of people can do this, which is problematic because unlabeled emotions often go misunderstood, which leads to irrational choices and counterproductive actions. People with high EQs master their emotions because they understand them, and they use an extensive vocabulary of feelings to do so. While many people might describe themselves as simply feeling “bad,” emotionally intelligent people can pinpoint whether they feel “irritable,” “frustrated,” “downtrodden,” or “anxious.” The more specific your word choice, the better insight you have into exactly how you are feeling, what caused it, and what you should do about it.

3. They're assertive. People with high EQs balance good manners, empathy, and kindness with the ability to assert themselves and establish boundaries. This tactful combination is ideal for handling conflict. When most people are crossed, they default to passive or aggressive behavior. Emotionally intelligent people remain balanced and assertive by steering themselves away from unfiltered emotional reactions. This enables them to neutralize difficult and toxic people without creating enemies.

4. They're curious about other people. It doesn't matter if they're introverted or extroverted,

emotionally intelligent people are curious about everyone around them. This curiosity is the product of empathy, one of the most significant gateways to a high EQ. The more you care about other people and what they're going through, the more curiosity you're going to have about them.

5. They forgive, but they don't forget. Emotionally intelligent people live by the motto “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” They forgive in order to prevent a grudge, but they never forget. The negative emotions that come with holding onto a grudge are actually a stress response. Holding on to that stress can have devastating health consequences, and emotionally intelligent people know to avoid this at all costs. However, offering forgiveness doesn't mean they'll give a wrongdoer another chance. Emotionally intelligent people will not be bogged down by mistreatment from others, so they quickly let things go and are assertive in protecting themselves from future harm.

6. They won't let anyone limit their joy. When your sense of pleasure and satisfaction are derived from comparing yourself to others, you are no longer the master of your own happiness. When emotionally intelligent people feel good about something that they've done, they won't let anyone's opinions or accomplishments take that away from them. While it's impossible to turn off your reactions to what others think of you, you don't have to compare yourself to others, and you can always take people's opinions with a grain of salt. That way, no matter what other people are thinking or doing, your self-worth comes from within. Regardless of what people think of you at any particular moment, one thing is certain—you're never as good or bad as they say you are.

7. They make things fun. Emotionally intelligent people know exactly what makes them happy, and they constantly work to bring this happiness into everything

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they do. They turn monotonous work into games, go the extra mile to make people they care about happy, and take breaks to enjoy the things they love no matter how busy they are. They know that injecting this fun into their lives fights off stress and builds lasting resilience.

8. They are difficult to offend. If you have a firm grasp of whom you are, it's difficult for someone to say or do something that gets your goat. Emotionally intelligent people are self-confident and open-minded, which creates a pretty thick skin.

9. They quash negative self-talk. A big step in developing emotional intelligence involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that—thoughts, not facts. You can stop the negative and pessimistic things your inner voice says by writing them down. Once you've taken a moment to slow down the negative momentum of your thoughts, you will be more rational and clear-headed in evaluating their veracity. You can bet that your statements aren't true any time you use words such as "never," "worst," and "ever." If your statements still look like facts once they're on paper, take them to a friend and see if he or she agrees with you. Then the truth will surely come out.

Bringing It All Together

Unlike your IQ, your EQ is highly malleable. As you train your brain by repeatedly practicing new emotionally intelligent behaviors, your brain builds the pathways needed to make them into habits. Before long, you will begin responding to your surroundings with emotional intelligence without even having to think about it. And as your brain reinforces the use of new behaviors, the connections supporting old, destructive behaviors will die off.

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning coauthor of [Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) and the cofounder of TalentSmart® the world's leading provider of emotional intelligence [tests](#) and [training](#) serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries.

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