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How to build emotional intelligence skills

Soft skills are critical for effective people management. Initiative, adaptability, and persuasiveness are some examples of soft skills. But the most essential soft skill you need to be a good leader is emotional intelligence (EI). What is emotional intelligence? Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient can be described as the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions and perceive and respond to those of others. The term was coined by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer in their 1990 seminal article "Emotional Intelligence". They defined it as: "The ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." The term became hugely popular after psychologist Daniel Goleman published his book Emotional Intelligence in 1995. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence includes the following qualities: Self awareness (being in touch with your emotions) Self management (managing distressing emotions so they don't impede your functionality) Motivation (being able to stay positive in the face of challenges) Empathy (knowing what others are feeling) The social skills to use all these traits for productive communication and relationship building What are the benefits of emotional intelligence in the workplace? The success of your business does not just depend on technical skills. It also depends on how well you interact with, understand, and motivate your workforce. Effective people management skills will help you reduce conflict in the workplace and increase productivity. For instance, you need empathy to be able to gauge how your team is feeling about a project or a workplace issue to resolve it or motivate them accordingly. Being able to perceive the emotions of others will help you understand what drives them. This may help you delegate accordingly and get the best out of your team. Not only should you work on increasing your own emotional intelligence, but also help your staff develop such critical soft skills. Employees with high EI are collaborative, self-motivated, easy to get along with and good at building positive relationships with colleagues and clients. This, inevitably, benefits your bottom line. How do I sharpen my emotional intelligence? We'd recommend that you strengthen the 5 core qualities that define emotional intelligence. Work on self-awareness Reflect on your emotions and how they influence your reactions and behaviour in the workplace. Conduct a self-appraisal. What are your emotional strengths and weakness? What areas do you need to work on? Do you avoid confrontation? Or do you tend to lose your temper quickly? Do you make decisions in the spur of the moment? You could practice mindfulness or meditation if it suits you. Another effective way to build self-awareness is to keep a journal where you write your thoughts and goals. This will help you detect and correct unhelpful thought patterns and behaviours. Being able to correctly analyze the reason for how you're feeling will help you manage that emotion better. Learn to manage distressing emotions Are you able to handle difficult emotions effectively? It is important to know how to manage your negative emotions so that they don't affect your productivity or ability to make sound decisions. Once you've identified the distressing emotion you struggle with, think of ways you could manage it. For example, a little stress can be motivating, but too much of it can be crippling. If stress is your problematic emotion, find ways - such as exercise - to deal with it. Find ways to stay motivated People with high emotional intelligence are self-motivated. They are realistically optimistic. They don't waste their time and energy on needless drama, taking things personally or complaining. Instead, they have a solution-oriented approach to challenges. Internal motivation comes from having a passion for what you do. To work on your motivation, try and focus on the things that you love about your job. It could be the satisfaction you get from providing good service to your customers or from mentoring your staff. Remember, you lead by example. Your positivity and enthusiasm towards work will also set the tone for your employees. Practice empathy Empathy is a quality that'll benefit both your personal and professional life. Try to consider things from the perspective of your employees and clients, even if you disagree with them. Do so especially before reacting impulsively or criticizing someone. Try to understand where people are coming from. Think about how their emotions and motivations may be similar or different from yours. This will help you manage people and resolve workplace disagreements or conflicts more effectively. Reflect on how you interact with others. Do you treat people with respect? Do you listen to them or take their opinions into account? Do you acknowledge their contributions? More importantly, when someone makes a mistake at work, do you encourage them to learn from it? Polish your social skills Strong social skills are very important in the workplace. They help you communicate with your co-workers and customers and build positive relationships. If you feel you need to improve how you interact with others, try zeroing in on the aspects of socializing where you struggle. Do you have a hard time remembering names? Could you be a better listener? Would you like to be more assertive? Does your body language need work? Do you wish to be a better public speaker? Once you know what areas need work, find appropriate resources that'll help you develop that skill. Where do I start? You could start by measuring your current emotional quotient. There are several methods to assess your EI level. You could either consult a mental health professional or find an assessment online. You could also opt for a coaching program to develop your EI. Research says emotional intelligence is a skill that can get better with practice. It is important that you practice and persist in your efforts to improve your emotional quotient. Do you have questions related to HR and employee management? Our experts can help you develop company policies as well as with any other HR, health and safety, or employment advice you need. See how we have helped other small and medium businesses get their business compliant with provincial legislation. Medically reviewed by Kendra Kubala, PsyD — Written by Hilary Lebow — Updated on June 6, 2021 ComponentsWhy it's importantExamplesHow to improve EQTakeawayEmotional intelligence allows you to enhance key areas of your life like home, work, and school.You've seen them: The people who appear to be cool as a cucumber on deadline. Those who handle awkward family dinners with grace. The ones that get where you're coming from, without you having to say a lot.That's because they may possess a certain skill set in spades — emotional intelligence.Intelligence, in the general sense, is the ability to learn new concepts and apply your knowledge to problems. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is similar. It's the ability to learn about yourself and apply that wisdom to the world around you.Research suggests that a high EQ is associated with an array of benefits, from improved mental health and relationships, to higher job satisfaction and academic performance.The term "emotional intelligence" was coined in the 1990s, then popularized by psychologist and author Daniel Goleman in his book "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ."Here are the 5 components he references: Self-awarenessIf you're self-aware, you can see your own patterns of behaviors and motives. You know how your emotions and actions impact those around you, for better or for worse. You can name your own emotions when they come up and understand why they're there. You can also recognize your triggers, identify your strengths, and see your own limitations.Being self-aware can also mean you're humble — we're all only human, after all. Self-regulationIf you can self-regulate, your emotional reactions are in proportion to the given circumstances.You know how to pause, as needed, and control your impulses. You think before you act and consider the consequences.It also means you know how to ease tension, manage conflict, cope with difficult scenarios, and adapt to changes in your environment. It's all about bringing out the part of yourself that helps manage emotions.MotivationIf you're intrinsically motivated, you have a thirst for personal development. You're highly driven to succeed, whatever your version of success looks like.You're inspired to accomplish goals because it helps you grow as a person, rather than doing it for outside rewards like money, fame, status, or recognition.EmpathyIf you're empathic, you're a healthy level of self-interested — but not self-centered. In conversations, you can understand where someone is coming from. You can "walk a mile in their shoes," so to speak. Even if the exact scenario hasn't happened to you, you can draw on your life experience to imagine how it may feel and be compassionate about what they're going through.You're slow to judge others and possess the awareness that we're all just doing the best we can with the circumstances we've been given. When we know better, we do better.Social skillsIf you've developed your social skills, you're adept at working in teams. You're aware of others and their needs in a conversation or conflict resolution.You're welcoming in conversation, using active listening, eye contact, verbal communication skills, and open body language. You know how to develop a rapport with others or express leadership, if the occasion calls for it.Humans are social animals — we're wired for connection. The more we can build positive relationships and develop cooperative connections, the more enriching our lives may be.Unsurprisingly, research has shown that there's a correlation between higher EQ and happiness.But even when the going gets tough, EQ can help us with that, too.In an academic setting, students who demonstrate high emotional intelligence, especially in the areas of emotional regulation and empathy, may be less likely to experience bullying, according to research.Work is another example. Research in 2013 suggests that well-developed EQ can help you achieve the goals of your organization and increase your job satisfaction, in part because of the positive relationships fostered in the workplace. In fact, according to that same study, a high EQ can help other people around you achieve success, particularly in group projects. When you manage your emotions, this influences those around you to do the same. Everyone wins.Emotional intelligence exists on a continuum. Here are some common examples that explore what a higher versus a lower EQ may look like. Self-regulationScenario: You're in a meeting and a boss criticizes you in front of other co-workers. Higher EQ: You maintain composure, then politely excuse yourself to process your emotions in a safe environment. Lower EQ: You may become defensive and storm out of the office. EmpathyScenario: Your roommate tells you that it hurts their feelings when you forget to take out the trash, which you agreed to.Higher EQ: You explain why you dropped the ball and tell them you understand why they're hurt, then come up with an action plan together about how to get both of your needs met.Lower EQ: You find it difficult to understand why they're so upset and feel attacked by their criticism.Self-awarenessScenario: You and your colleague were up for the same promotion, but they got it instead of you.Higher EQ: You reflect and realize that, if you're being honest with yourself, you weren't working as hard as your co-worker and their promotion is well-deserved.Lower EQ: You may fire off an angry email to your boss, demanding an explanation or threatening to quit.MotivationScenario: You passed an exam and posted about it on social media.Higher EQ: You're proud of yourself for the goal that you achieved and appreciative of any support you receive.Lower EQ: You may question your success or worth because your post didn't get very many "likes."Social skillsScenario: You're on a date and it doesn't seem to be going very well.Higher EQ: You ask open-ended questions, maintain good eye contact, and practice active listening.Lower EQ: You may stop paying attention and decide there must be something wrong with your date.Some people are born with EQ, while others can think of it as a skill set that needs to be acquired. With practice, it's possible to develop or strengthen it.Here are a few ways to do just that:Self-awareness. Consider setting a regular time or day to journal. This can allow you to reflect on how you behaved in interactions and make a note of things that bothered you. You can go back and read over them from time to time and "study" yourself. You can also meditate and observe your thoughts.Self-regulation. It may help to practice deep breathing exercises regularly, especially during conflict. You can learn to reframe challenges as opportunities in disguise and "failures" as learning experiences. Try to practice radical acceptance of any emotions that come up and verbalize what you're feeling.Motivation. Consider taking time out and celebrating each one of your wins. When you decide you want to do something new, it's a good idea to identify your "why." It can also help to break down your to-do list into bite-size chunks, or micro-tasks, and to work with an accountability partner or coach.Empathy. To build empathy, try paying attention to your surroundings. See if you can pick up on the "energy" of your environment. You could also try talking to new people or volunteering for a cause you care about. If you're stuck in traffic, consider looking around at people sitting in their cars and seeing what you can pick up about them.Social skills. Aim to put yourself in new situations. When you do, try to pay attention to your body language and maintain eye contact. Practicing active listening can be beneficial, too. Consider this quote from Gandhi: "Speak only if it improves upon silence."Some people have emotional intelligence naturally, while others need to work a little harder at it. It's well worth the effort you put in, though, as it can improve many areas of your life.If you're ready to take the next step, ask if your workplace has emotional intelligence training available.You can also enroll in training online, like the one through the Institute for Health and Human Potential. Believe it or not, you can even find EQ courses on Skillshare or Udemy, two subscription-based online learning platforms.If you need a starting point, take a free EQ quiz here. This may give you a good idea of where you're excelling and what areas you could improve on.The bottom line is: You're the one who gets to control your emotions, so they don't control you. Once you learn this useful skill, your quality of life may improve. The better it gets, the better it gets. Last medically reviewed on June 6, 2021

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