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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT WORK

WHAT IT IS AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

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Emotional Intelligence (EI): A Primer

When you hear the term *emotional intelligence*, you may be tempted to roll your eyes. But EI (as it's known for short) shouldn't be dismissed as the latest workplace buzzword that calls for team hugs and trust falls. In fact, it plays an important role in today's workplace — for employees and the managers who hire them.

Why is this so, and what is emotional intelligence, anyway? It can be defined as a person's capacity to be aware of, control and effectively express emotions. Perhaps more importantly, it involves understanding how others feel and using that knowledge to manage how you interact with them. Nearly all of the more than 600 human resources (HR) managers (95 per cent) and 800 workers (99 per cent) we surveyed said they think it's important for employees to have emotional intelligence. The level of someone's emotional intelligence is often referred to as his or her emotional quotient (EQ).

As a worker, how do you know if your emotional intelligence is high or low? And if you're a hiring manager, how can you evaluate whether your current team or potential new hires have the emotional quotient you need for top performance? Read on to understand more.



To get a read on your current EI skills, [take our quiz](#).

NOT SEEING EYE TO EYE ON EI

— 92%

OF WORKERS FEEL
THEY HAVE STRONG
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

74% —

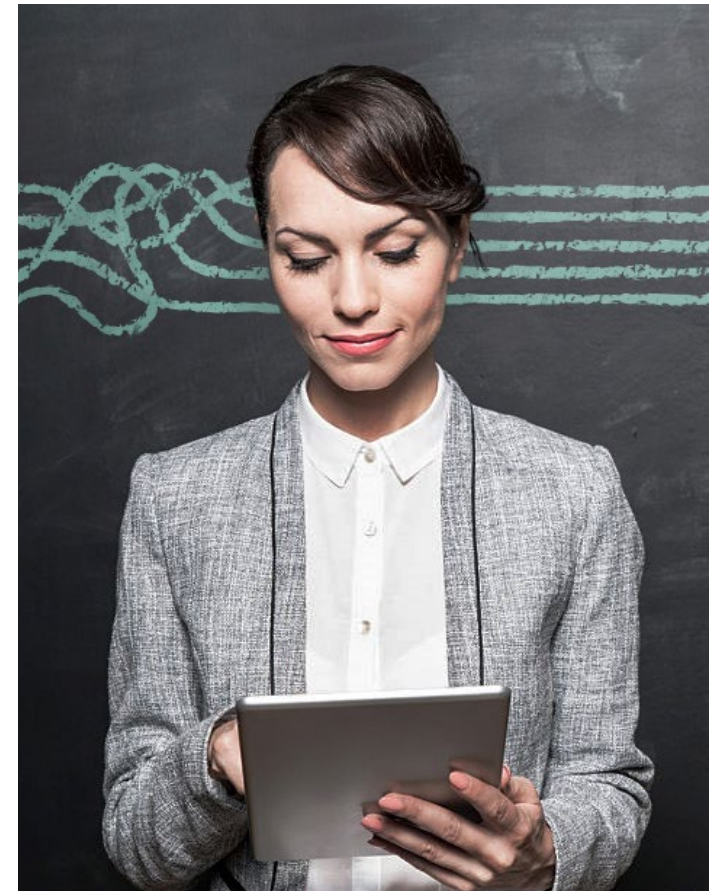
FEEL THEIR BOSSES
DO, TOO

Why Administrative Professionals Need EI

The attributes of emotional intelligence are important in any job setting, but especially in the world administrative professionals occupy. Why? Because the job by nature involves interacting personally with a wide range of people.

And that range keeps growing — as do the job's duties. According to OfficeTeam's Office of the Future research, administrative professionals are increasingly taking on tasks outside their traditional roles. Their new responsibilities can include anything from authorization of office purchases to managing key projects to monitoring social media forums. In addition, today's support staff are often required to work as part of a team, and some may also hold supervisory positions.

All of these emerging aspects of the job — combined with the traditional administrative duties that involve performing office support activities for multiple managers and communicating with a variety of internal and external parties — require terrific people skills. Or, to look at it a different way, the job requires a well-developed ability to manage one's own and others' emotions.



Specifically, emotional intelligence helps administrative professionals for several reasons:

- Requests can come to support staff from all angles and are often urgent and/or tricky. This requires the ability to calmly execute under pressure, as well as the motivation to tackle challenging situations.
- Many administrative professionals make decisions on behalf of their bosses or other decision makers. Empathy, one of the aspects of EI, can help support staff put themselves in other people's shoes and leave their own emotions out of the equation to get the job done.
- Administrative staff deal with a variety of work styles and personalities. Employees with social skills, another

hallmark of a high EQ, are able to respond diplomatically when internal or external clients are showing their emotions in a negative way — in other words, those revealing a low EQ.

- Administrative professionals must exercise discretion and tact. This is key when interacting with supervisors, colleagues and clients, and people with high EI will do this more naturally.



Boosting Your EI — and Your Team's

In an interview with OfficeTeam, Daniel Goleman, Ph.D. and co-director for the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, told us that people with high EI make the best team members and leaders.

“Emotional intelligence includes abilities like emotional balance, reaching toward goals, adaptability, empathy, teamwork and influence,” he explained.

“These are the kind of people who make a team or business high performing.”



THE GREATEST BENEFIT OF HAVING EMPLOYEES WITH HIGH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, ACCORDING TO HR MANAGERS:

43%

INCREASED
MOTIVATION/
MORALE

21%

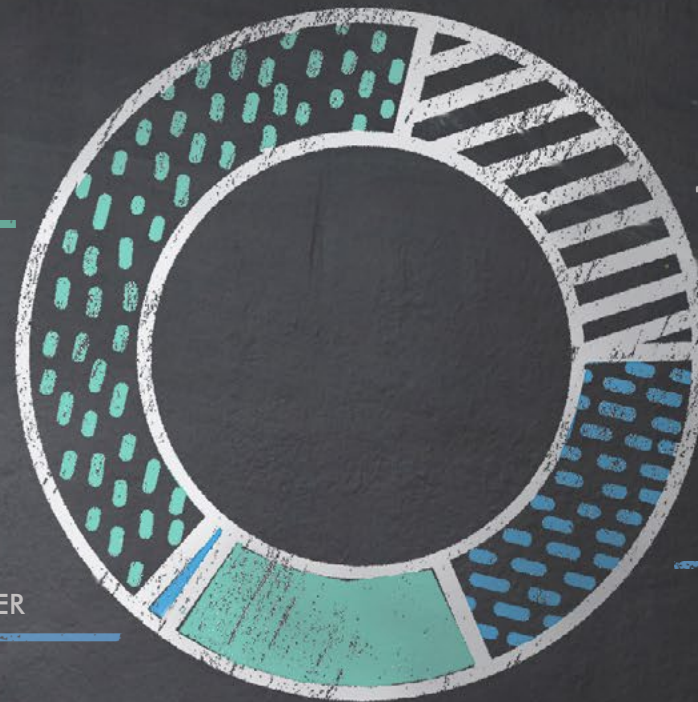
IMPROVED
LEADERSHIP

19%

BETTER
COLLABORATION

1% OTHER

16% EFFECTIVE CONFLICT
RESOLUTION



So far so good, you may be thinking. But how do you put this information to work? How do you improve your own emotional intelligence — or motivate your team to do so?

To find out, you need to dig a little deeper into the five key components of emotional intelligence in the workplace, which Goleman was the first to identify:

1. SELF-AWARENESS

2. SELF-REGULATION

3. MOTIVATION

4. EMPATHY

5. SOCIAL SKILLS

WITH THIS LIST IN MIND, ASK YOURSELF OR YOUR TEAM MEMBERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:



Are you aware enough of your emotions and times when you're showing them that you can avoid letting your feelings rule you?



When you recognize things about how you work that need improvement, are you inspired to improve those weaker areas to help you perform better?



Can you easily identify with and understand the wants, needs and viewpoints of others?



Are you easy to talk to, a good communicator and adept at building and maintaining relationships?

If you answered “yes” to these questions for yourself or a team member, then you (and he or she) are likely to have a high emotional quotient level. If you answered “no” or you aren’t sure, here are some tactics that can help you or your team enhance the five emotional intelligence elements:

1. COMMIT TO BOOSTING YOUR SELF-AWARENESS.

Most people think they have a solid read on how they come across to others, but in reality, that’s often not the case. Be on the lookout for which of your emotions, like frustration or stress, are most likely to boil over. Take charge to manage those emotions before they affect your job

performance. If you’re unsure about what might trigger you in different situations, ask for input from people you trust and who know you well.

If you’re a supervisor, poor self-awareness may be causing more trouble than you realize. Nearly one in four respondents in a Robert Half study ranked “unhappiness with management” among the top three reasons that staff members quit. There’s a good bet those bosses aren’t aware that their actions are prompting the exodus of valued employees. With this in mind, consider how your behaviour, such as being unreachable and micromanaging, affects others.



2. THINK BEFORE YOU REACT.

More than six in 10 (61 per cent) employees we polled said they've let their emotions get the better of them at work. This happens less commonly with those who have a high emotional quotient because they make a concerted effort to manage their emotional responses and stress levels in the office. Not keeping emotions in check can be bad for your image at work: 86 per cent of employees said frequent emotional outbursts can affect others' perception of your professionalism.

Thinking before you react typically means considering the bigger picture. Emotionally intelligent people are able to consider the whole forest rather than getting distracted by trees. When you feel upset and want to react immediately, remember that doing so can hurt how others view you. By taking the time to think things through, you're practicing self-regulation.

Put some distance from your emotions by walking away from the situation for a moment to regain composure and thoughtfully reflect on your options. If there's no time for this, try to regulate your emotions "on the spot" by taking a few deep breaths and silently counting to five before responding.

Sometimes controlling your unwanted emotions involves preplanning, including trying to avoid circumstances that trigger these feelings, according to Susan Krauss Whitbourne Ph.D., writing in *Psychology Today*.¹ "If you know that you're most likely to get angry when you're in a hurry, for example, then don't leave things for the last minute," she advises. "It may sound like a small thing, but not feeling rushed during the course of the day can keep you more even keel and help you react more calmly to situations or people."



1. Susan Krauss Whitbourne Ph.D., "[5 Ways to Get Your Unwanted Emotions Under Control](#)," February 7, 2015.

3. MOTIVATE YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM.

When you're motivated to tackle each day with enthusiasm, you're far more likely to have positive interactions with the people you encounter. That's EI, pure and simple. Put yourself in an "up" mood by touching base each day with upbeat coworkers, mentors and others who know you well. Let them know about any obstacles with your work and ask for ideas for overcoming them. Your colleagues may bring a fresh perspective to situations. If you're a manager, make sure work assignments play to each team member's strengths. Help your team see the light at the end of the tunnel during heavy workload periods by bringing in reinforcements until the load lightens.

4. UNDERSTAND OTHERS THROUGH LISTENING.

A big part of emotional intelligence is empathizing with the feelings, wants, needs and viewpoints of those around you. This includes people at all levels of your team as well as clients of the company. To understand others, you need to first listen closely to them. Finding yourself thinking of other things while someone else is talking, frequently interrupting or being always mentally a step ahead of the speaker are signs that your listening skills need some work.

Emotional intelligence involves noticing nonverbal cues when people are talking to you, not just hearing their words. So take the time to ask questions of key people on your team to be sure you truly understand



their ultimate goals and what motivates them. This takes extra effort and self-discipline, but improving your listening skills and asking clarifying questions will help you see where others are coming from, raising your emotional quotient.

5. POLISH YOUR SOCIAL SKILLS.

Having strong interpersonal skills can help you build capital throughout your career, whether it's making a positive first impression or creating long-term professional relationships that could open doors to your next opportunity. Improving these skills involves the following:

- Listening actively
- Effectively communicating verbally and in writing
- Continuing to build and improve professional connections
- Being proactive about resolving conflicts
- Showing genuine interest in people you work with
- Publicly recognizing others' ideas and achievements
- Maintaining a friendly tone
- Ignoring distractions (e.g., your cellphone ringing) while you're talking to someone
- Letting your sense of humour shine through — when appropriate



OfficeTeam offers our registered candidates a number of online courses that can help you build your EI skills.

[Submit your resume today to get started.](#)

Hiring for EI

For managers, it's important to help enhance your staff's emotional intelligence, but what about also making it a consideration when evaluating job candidates?

A growing number of companies are factoring emotional intelligence into their hiring process for the same reason they focus on it for their current workers: Employees with a high emotional quotient can more efficiently deal with workplace changes, challenging situations and difficult colleagues — and they make great leaders.

This is easier said than done, you may be thinking. How can hiring managers effectively gauge emotional intelligence in a resume or a simple interview? Are there specific indicators that suggest a candidate might have a high emotional quotient?

Yes. The language applicants use to describe their goals and accomplishments often holds clues to their emotional quotient. Are there indicators they were self-motivated enough to take outside developmental courses? Do they give credit to others when describing initiatives that would clearly be joint efforts?



★ PRINTABLE INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

You can look for these types of clues during a personal interview as well. Here are some questions you might ask yourself while interviewing:

- ☐ If an applicant talks about a failure, does the comment suggest an awareness of some personal responsibility for the episode, or does he or she simply blame others?
- ☐ When it comes to handling criticism, is the person able to acknowledge any shortcomings and keep things in perspective rather than becoming defensive and making excuses?
- ☐ What about teamwork? Can candidates describe how they have confronted simmering issues and helped to solve them with a team, or are the answers slanted more individually? Similarly, when talking about successes, do they acknowledge the contributions of others, or take all the credit?
- ☐ How does the applicant interact with you, the hiring manager? Does he or she engage in small talk, or steer clear of it?
- ☐ Do candidates seem genuinely interested in the job and the people they'll be working with? Or do you sense indifference?
- ☐ Do applicants communicate in terms that are easily understandable and show concessions to others, or do the answers suggest they may be tuned out emotionally and blind to needs and preferences that aren't their own?
- ☐ What about their body language? Does it indicate they're listening attentively — or distracted?

If any answers tend toward the latter in any of these questions, it may be a red flag for a low emotional quotient. Be sure to check out interview questions to ask on the next page.

★ PRINTABLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

During an in-person interview, hiring managers should be prepared to ask (and interviewees should be prepared to answer) the following types of questions to help determine capacity for emotional intelligence:

- If you've previously reported to multiple supervisors at the same time, how did you get to know each person's preferences and juggle conflicting priorities?

- Tell me about a workplace conflict you were involved in, either with your peers or someone else in the company. How did you manage that conflict, and were you able to resolve it?

- Can you describe the most challenging supervisor you've ever worked with? What was the most difficult thing about that relationship from your perspective, and how did you manage it?

- What would a previous boss say is the area that you need to work on most? Have you taken steps to improve in this area, and if so, what have you tried to change?

- Tell me about a day when everything went wrong. How did you handle it?

- What type of working environment brings out your best performance? Your worst?

- If business priorities change, describe how you would help your team understand and carry out the shifted goals.

- Tell me about a colleague you didn't get along with and why you think you didn't see eye to eye.

Once top candidates have cleared the interview stage, you can also take emotional intelligence into consideration when checking references. To get an outsider's read on the candidate's emotional quotient, you can ask professional references the same types of questions that you presented during the interview.

For example, you might ask references to comment on how well the applicant does the following:

- Handles criticism
- Resolves conflict
- Listens to others
- Motivates other team members



HR MANAGERS REVEAL WHAT THEIR COMPANIES USE TO GAUGE
JOB APPLICANTS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:



70%
REFERENCE
CHECKS



55%
BEHAVIOURAL-
BASED INTERVIEW
QUESTIONS



32%
PERSONALITY OR
PSYCHOMETRIC
TESTS



15%
WE DON'T GAUGE
CANDIDATES'
EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE

Navigating the EI Learning Curve

Whether you're a worker or an employer, it can take a shift in style to adopt this new way of thinking. You may need to learn to focus more on how you handle emotional issues and relationships than you have previously.

Once you get past this learning curve, however, you'll soon get a sense of how well you — and those who may now or in the future report to you — manage emotions, show empathy and remain motivated.

It's worth it to take the time to understand emotional intelligence, because employees with a high emotional quotient will ultimately be more successful in their careers.



At OfficeTeam, we do our best to ensure our administrative candidates are a match for our clients' workplace culture. When you need help finding the right administrative professional for your staffing needs, call OfficeTeam at 1.877.477.3574.

About OfficeTeam

OfficeTeam, a Robert Half company, is the world's leading staffing service specializing in the temporary placement of highly skilled office and administrative support professionals, ranging from executive and administrative assistants to receptionists and customer service representatives. Throughout the year, we compile the data, trends and insights we uncover through our daily contact with clients and candidates and our extensive research on employment and workplace issues. We offer this information in the form of complimentary guides, articles and other materials.

OfficeTeam has more than 300 locations worldwide. For additional information, visit officeteam.ca. Read the **Robert Half blog** for career and management advice.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The surveys of HR managers and workers were developed by OfficeTeam. They were conducted by independent research firms and include responses from 607 HR managers at companies with 20 or more employees and 809 workers age 18 years or older and employed in office environments in Canada and the United States.



IT'S TIME WE ALL WORK HAPPY.™

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