



Dean Savoca
M.Ed., BCC

Soft Skills Produce Hard Results

By Dean Savoca

Most of us have taken IQ tests to determine our chances of being academically successful. A few of us have taken EQ (Emotional Intelligence) tests, currently being used to determine a person's chance to be successful at work and in life. EQ assessments have been used by the United States Air Force, the Toronto Maple Leafs Hockey Team, Hallmark, AT&T and Coca-Cola, just to name a few.

IQ is about cognitive abilities that are largely established at birth, and can minimally be enhanced with an increase in knowledge and reasoning ability. Emotional Intelligence (EQ), known as "soft skills" or "street smarts" has, over the past 15-20 years, become an accepted indicator of success in life and on the job. Warren Bennis, a renowned leadership pioneer, said, "In the fields I have studied, emotional intelligence is more important and much more powerful than IQ in determining who emerges as a leader. IQ is a threshold competence. You need it, but it doesn't make you a star."

Research shows direct links between a leader's EQ and company profitability, employee performance, and employee retention. The best news is that EQ can be learned!

What is EQ?

Aristotle recognized the significance of EQ thousands of years before researchers decided to start their assessments. He said, "Anyone can become angry - that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way - that is not easy." Effectively managing anger takes high EQ. EQ is a measurement of your self- and others-awareness, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your emotions and your relationships.

Self-awareness includes appreciating your strengths and recognizing your weaknesses, knowing how you are perceived, recognizing personal power and understanding the emotions behind your behavior.

Others-awareness includes appreciating others' strengths and weaknesses, having empathy and accepting social responsibility.

Managing self includes emotional control, integrity, realistic optimism, stress management, motivation, intentionality and creativity.

Relationship management includes building trust, collaboration, conflict management, powerful influence and developing others.

In the July-August 2009 issue of *Harvard Business Review* there appeared a series of articles about leadership in the unstable world of that time. EQ characteristics are found throughout these articles: flexibility, stress tolerance, trust, self-awareness, sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others, empathy, realistic optimism and interdependence.

303.333.3038 • dean@savocaperformancegroup.com • www.savocaperformancegroup.com

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Why is EQ important?

Research shows direct links between a leader's EQ and the company's profitability, employee performance and employee retention. A 2013 report by the Human Capital Institute identified a leader's Emotional Intelligence as a key to driving ROI and organizational performance.

A specific example is Amazon's Jeff Bezos. In 2011, Bezos was #1 on the *Fortune 500* "Top 10 CEOs with Emotional Intelligence". In 2014 he was ranked #1 on the *Harvard Business Review* list of the "Best Performing CEOs in the World".

One of the *HBR* articles, "Rebuilding Companies as Communities" by Henry Mintzberg, said, "Companies must remake themselves into places of engagement, where people are committed to one another and their enterprise." Mintzberg's opinion was not uncommon to the other authors who contributed to the series. Successful business is about satisfying and productive relationships. Even when a person has the knowledge and the skills to get a job done with excellence, they can be a detriment to the organization because their style is offensive to the people with whom they work. Some are arrogant and think they know it all and will not ask questions. Others may become ineffective under stress.

It takes more than leaders with high EQ, however, for an organization to be stable. There must be employees with high EQ as well, in order for businesses to succeed. This is why some companies are making EQ assessments part of their hiring process. The US Air Force was a forerunner in this practice. In 1999, they developed a recruitment model based on EQ competencies and retention increased from 46% in one year. Soft skills produced hard results.

How can you enhance your EQ?

It starts with knowing your EQ. The best way is to take an EQ assessment and create a development plan based on the results. Here are some sample questions. Rate yourself 1-5 to help determine your current level of EQ:

I can accept feedback and criticism without becoming defensive.

I am sensitive to other people's emotions and moods.

I can readily understand how other people feel.

I am confident in my abilities to make things happen in my life.

I confront unethical behavior in others rather than "turn a blind eye".

I continually strive to learn and improve

Improving your soft skills can produce some hard results.



Dean Savoca, M.Ed., BCC, spent his early career in the hospitality industry as a Travel Director and Account Manager for Maritz for nine years, and as a general manager of a Colorado-based destination management company. Now a performance management and results expert, Dean works at the company and association level as a **keynote speaker and conference facilitator**; at the team and department level as a **management and sales trainer**; and at the individual executive level as a **coach**. Whatever the format – conferences, sales training, leadership development or strategic planning -- Dean guides people through processes that focus their attention on core issues, and rallies them to action, *often right there in the room*. **The result is a better bottom line** – boosted by improved performance, higher productivity, and more cohesive teamwork.

In addition to managing his national speaking schedule and thriving executive coaching practice, Dean is a member of the editorial advisory board for *Colorado Meeting + Events* magazine and the Director of Programs for the Meetings Industry Council (MIC) of Colorado. In 2014 Dean was distinguished as a national "Best in Class" speaker by the Professional Convention Management Association. He served as the 2012-2013 President of the National Speakers Association – Colorado; the Chairman of the Cherry Creek Chamber of Commerce, Denver in 2009; and has been on the Board of Directors of Destination Colorado. Dean holds a Master's Degree in Organizational Performance and Change and is a Board Certified Coach.

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