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## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS: WHAT THEY ARE & HOW TO DEVELOP THEM

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**Lauren Landry** |  Staff

 Career Development, Leadership, Leadership Principles

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Emotional intelligence is [a crucial component of leadership](#). Your ability to manage your emotions, as well as recognize and influence others', has been considered one of the strongest indicators of workplace performance. [Research shows](#) that 90 percent of top performers are high in emotional intelligence.

Technical skills will only get you so far. If you're an aspiring or current leader, you need to build your emotional intelligence to bring out the best in others and cultivate high-performing teams.

“Leaders prime the emotional state of the organization,” said Travis Bradberry, president of emotional intelligence provider TalentSmart, to [the Society for Human Resource Management](#). “When they’re ineffective, when they set poor examples of how they treat other people, that trickles down throughout the company.”

## WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Emotional intelligence**, also known as emotional quotient or EQ, is the ability to understand and manage your emotions and the emotions of others.

Similar to IQ, emotional intelligence can be measured through various assessments, but IQ represents cognitive abilities while EQ is a measure of one’s emotional capabilities.

While emotional intelligence is beneficial for everyone, it’s especially important for those in leadership positions. Emotionally intelligent leaders can empathize with others, communicate effectively, and manage conflict. All of these abilities are qualities of effective leaders.

If you want to enhance your leadership capabilities, here are five emotional intelligence skills you need and ways you can develop them.

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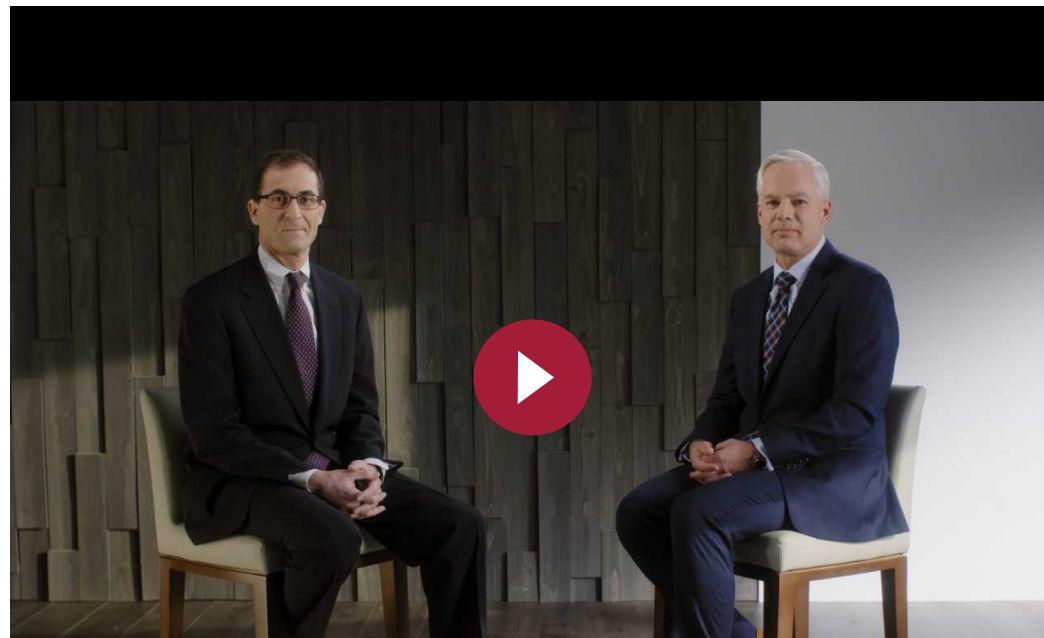
## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS LEADERS NEED

## 1. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is having a clear understanding of your strengths, limitations, emotions, beliefs, and motivations. It sounds simple enough, yet 79 percent of executives [surveyed by organizational consulting firm Korn Ferry](#) had at least one blind spot—or a skill they ranked among their strongest that others reported as a weakness.

Leaders who are adept at recognizing and managing their emotions are better equipped to perceive others' feelings and know how to motivate employees. Those who don't could see a slip in performance: [Research in the Harvard Business Review](#) found that teams with individuals who lack self-awareness make worse decisions and are less effective at conflict management.

By acknowledging your weaknesses, you can build trust and transparency among your team. You can also own your professional development by knowing the areas in which you need to improve in order to advance your career.





## 2. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation refers to how you manage your emotions, behaviors, and impulses. The more self-aware you are, the easier this becomes; if you can recognize what you're feeling and why, you can respond appropriately.

"In my experience, I've never seen the tendency toward radical outbursts to surface as an indicator of strong leadership," writes Daniel Goleman, the psychologist who popularized emotional intelligence, [on his website](#).

If prone to emotional outbursts or overreacting, there are tactics you can use to improve your self-regulation, such as:

- **Pausing Before Responding:** Give yourself time to stop and think before immediately replying. This could be as simple as taking a deep breath and allowing for a 20-second pause so that your feelings get out of the way of your thoughts.
- **Taking a Step Back:** Sometimes, you might need to leave the room, and that's OK. It's often better to take a walk, drink some water, or call a friend than to make a snap judgment, send a scathing email, or lash out at your team.
- **Recognizing Your Emotions:** Try jotting down what it is you're feeling and what caused the distress. You'll likely start identifying patterns. If you know what triggers you, the next time a similar situation occurs, you'll be better positioned to handle it in a healthy, positive way.

If you acknowledge your emotions and give yourself time to process them, you can carefully craft how you respond and avoid doing anything that could jeopardize the goodwill you've worked hard to build.

### 3. Empathy

Empathy is the capability of understanding another person's experiences and emotions, and has been ranked as [the top leadership skill needed today](#) by global consulting firm DDI. According to DDI's research, leaders who excel at listening and responding with empathy perform more than 40 percent higher in coaching, planning, and decision-making.

According to [a separate survey by Businessolver \(pdf\)](#), 96 percent of employees rank empathy as important, but 92 percent say it's undervalued. It shouldn't be, though: Companies that prioritize empathy experience an increase in revenue, retention, and productivity.

By actively listening to your employees and taking the time to understand their wants and needs, you can boost engagement, build trust, and more effectively coach them through challenges. The more your team feels appreciated, the more invested they'll be, which, in turn, leads to higher morale and stronger company culture.

### 4. Motivation

Motivation refers to your ability to inspire both yourself and others to action. Here, it's essential to lead by example. Self-motivated leaders care more about hitting organizational milestones than monetary awards. They set goals, take initiative, rise to the challenge, and stay optimistic during turbulent times.

The more positive you are, the more confident your team will feel. Your intrinsic motivation will permeate the organization, and you'll have a better understanding of [how to empower employees](#).

### 5. Social Skills

Social skills are all about how you perceive emotions and interact and communicate with others. For example, emotionally intelligent leaders can walk into a room of employees with pursed lips and clenched fists and not only sense the tension, but know how to address and resolve the conflict before it escalates.

The more in tune you are with your emotions, the easier it will be to assess others'. And if you can assess others' feelings, you can more easily build and maintain relationships. Leaders with strong social skills know they can't achieve success alone. Surpassing goals and reaching milestones requires collaboration, communication, and a shared vision.

***Related:*** [How to Give Feedback Effectively](#)

## HOW TO DEVELOP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

If you have gaps in your current skill set, there are actions you can take to boost your emotional intelligence. Methods include:

### **1. Try Journaling**

At the end of the workday, reflect on how your meetings, projects, and interactions went—whether positive or negative. By writing your thoughts down, you can spot specific patterns about your behaviors and reactions, as well as others'.

*Where did you excel? How are your employees feeling? Are there certain people or situations that frustrated you and, if so, why?* The more introspective you are, the better. For example, you'll become more aware of what upsets you, so that you can avoid a future outburst, or mimic actions that have proven to boost employee morale.

## **2. Undergo a 360-Degree Assessment**

In a 360-degree assessment, you solicit feedback from your manager, colleagues, and peers, while also undergoing an individual self-assessment. Through the process, you can gain valuable insights into what your co-workers perceive as your strengths and weaknesses, as well as uncover any blind spots you might have.

According to Jack Zenger, CEO of leadership development firm Zenger Folkman, more than 85 percent of all Fortune 500 companies use 360-degree feedback. It can help improve leaders' self-awareness, which, in turn, can result in improved workplace effectiveness, less stress, and stronger relationships.

## **3. Practice Active Listening**

According to Psychology Today, only about 10 percent of people listen effectively. It's easy to get distracted by technology, background noise, and your own thoughts. Yet, to be an effective communicator and emotionally intelligent leader, you need to be a good listener.

To become more emotionally intelligent, practice active listening. Try to focus on what the speaker is saying and show that you're engaged by paraphrasing and using other non-verbal cues like nodding. By actively listening at work, it will be easier to connect with others and truly understand their thoughts and feelings.

## **4. Pay Attention to Your Emotions**

To understand the emotions of others, you need to understand your own first.

When you catch yourself feeling a particularly strong emotion, whether it's a positive or negative one, make a conscious effort to think about what you're



feeling. Take a second and consider *why* you're feeling this way and what might have triggered such a strong emotional response.

This will help you become more aware of your own emotions and better understand your colleagues'. As an empathetic leader, you'll be able to cultivate a high-performing team.

## 5. Take an Online Course or Training

If you're interested in diving deeper into emotional intelligence and enhancing your leadership capabilities, taking an [online leadership course](#) or training could be the best next step.

[Online courses](#) offer working professionals the flexibility to complete coursework on their schedule and connect with a global community of like-minded peers, all while gaining new skills and knowledge.

One program to consider is Harvard Business School Online's [Leadership Principles course](#), which provides a 360-degree assessment to help you better understand who you are as a leader and how others perceive you.

## IMPROVING YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Building your emotional intelligence skills can not only help you grow as a leader but enable you to motivate and coach teams more effectively. In turn, you can make a greater impact on your organization by boosting morale, productivity, and communication—enabling you to advance your business and career simultaneously.

*Do you want to improve your emotional intelligence? Explore our online course [Leadership Principles](#) and discover how you can unleash the potential*

*in yourself and others to create high-performing teams.*

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#### About the Author

*Lauren Landry is the director of marketing and communications for Harvard Business School Online. Prior to joining HBS Online, she worked at Northeastern University and BostInno, where she wrote nearly 3,500 articles covering early-stage tech and education—including the very launch of HBS Online. When she's not at HBS Online, you might find her teaching a course on digital media at Emerson College, chugging coffee, or telling anyone who's willing to listen terribly corny jokes.*

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