



What is Emotional Intelligence?

By Walker Armstong, President, Integrated Leadership Solutions,
Jerry Mabe, President and CEO, RightPath Resources, Inc.
Lee Ellis, Senior VP, RightPath Resources, Inc.

Over the last decade, there has been extensive research done on emotional intelligence (EQ). Peter Salovey, Jack Mayer, and Reuven Bar-On are some of the pre-eminent researchers in this field and Daniel Goleman’s book *Emotional Intelligence* published in 1995 really ignited the current interest in the subject. Goleman’s follow on books *Working with Emotional Intelligence* and *Primal Leadership* shifted the focus of EQ from a general discussion to the powerful role that emotional intelligence plays in the workplace in general and leadership in particular.

As addressed in the RightPath Resources Leadership 360° , EQ will be defined as an awareness of emotions (ours and others) and then the ability to respond appropriately to that information. This general concept is often referred to in EQ studies as the Four-Fold Model. For our purposes, we call this the *Awareness – Response Emotional Intelligence Model* and the graphic below depicts this concept of EQ.

EQ Self

Awareness enables us to **Understand** our own emotions. Next comes our *Response* as we apply that information to **Manage** our own behaviors.

EQ Others

Awareness is our ability to **Perceive** the emotions of others and then develop a *Response* that enables us to **Relate** in an appropriate and effective manner.

A Skill-Based Emotional Intelligence Model

	Self	Others
Awareness	Understand Emotions	Perceive Emotions
Response	Manage Response	Relate Appropriately

This model focuses on the development and deployment of the skills for gaining emotional awareness and then responding appropriately to manage our own emotions and respond effectively to others. This model provides the foundational psychological framework for behaviorally describing EQ in action.

Consider a typical external situation. A reckless driver crosses three lanes of traffic and just misses you as he cuts across to the exit. Your brain receives this information and appraises it as a severe threat/danger. Based on your own natural wiring and your past experience your instant reaction to such a threat may be Anger (adrenaline for fight or flight). Your impulse at this stage may be to react with **hostility** (the reactive side of Anger) by blowing your horn, screaming or wanting to “ram the jerk.” However, if you are able to overcome that initial impulse in order to process this information, you may likely decide to let the idiot go and be thankful that he didn’t cause an accident. In this case, you **assert** discipline over yourself to enable reason to override a potential negative reaction behavior. The old saying “better think twice before you do something

you'll regret" provides a practical example of the self-management associated with EQ. Much of our self-management comes from learned behavior. Perhaps your ability to respond with high EQ to the traffic situation above may be related to a time in the past when you operated a vehicle in a foolish manner or you may just have a good understanding of the dangers of road rage.

Research on negative leadership behaviors offer compelling examples of how emotionally-based *reactive* behaviors lead to executive derailment, which might be termed low EQ. For example, an executive who perceives a threat when someone disagrees with his logic and then reacts with hostility soon cuts himself off from any reality feedback or "bad news." People become afraid to challenge him/her.

Derailment can also occur when a proactive behavior response is overdone, eventually leading to negative results. For example, assertiveness (proactive behavior of anger) can provide energy and focus to get things done. However, when overdone, it can become controlling even without being hostile. Likewise, discernment (proactive behavior of fear) can be powerful but when overdone leads to "paralysis by analysis."

History is full of examples of leaders who encountered serious problems when their strengths were over-deployed or relied on too heavily. Consider General McArthur, an exceptional military leader, who was fired by President Truman due to his arrogant response to Presidential authority. In this case his weakness was over-extension of his confidence.

McArthur was indeed brilliant but as General Eisenhower said of him: "MacArthur could never see another sun, or even a moon for that matter, in the heavens as long as he was the sun."¹ McArthur's strong ego and sense of self-confidence was essential to his strategic battlefield success, but when he over-relied on these strengths he lost the ability to listen to others.

Summary of EQ

EQ is about how we manage our emotions in various situations involving self and others. It starts with an awareness of our own emotions and then our ability to manage our responses to those emotions. It is also about learning to recognize the emotions of others and respond by relating appropriately to the needs of the person and circumstances.

Those with high EQ have learned to perceive and process emotions accurately. They are able to slow down their responses sufficiently to make rationally based choices that are likely to bring positive outcomes. Finally, when a person overuses or overextends proactive strengths, he or she may be unaware of the negative impact on others. Thus the central theme of EQ is to gain awareness and respond appropriately. It sounds easy but it's a challenge for all of us. EQ is about choices and can be improved through awareness and learned behaviors.

¹ IKE THE SOLDIER As They Knew Him, Merle Miller, page 26, Perigee Books (The Putnam Publishing Group), 1988, New York NY