

When Technical Skills are Not Enough: The Role of Interpersonal Relationships in Leadership Success

Debra Cannarella, High Performing Systems, Inc.



Debra Cannarella
Director of Operations



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A technical manager felt like his career advancement had stalled, and he came to High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), for coaching. He had applied for a promotion and was turned down twice. When he asked a trusted mentor for suggestions, his mentor advised, “At the higher organizational levels, your technical skills will only get you so far. If you want to continue to move up, you need to consider the value of relationship building and polishing your people skills.”

Interpersonal Relationships and Emotional Intelligence

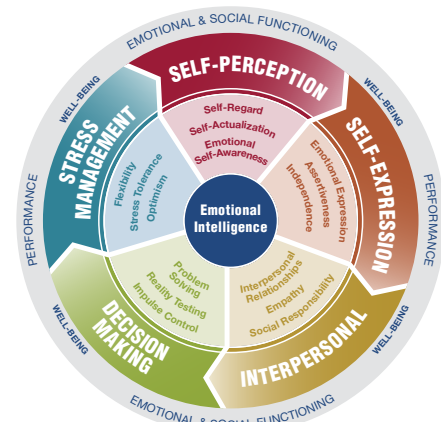
Interpersonal Relationships (IR) is one of the 15 Subscales of Emotional Intelligence measured by the EQ-i 2.0 (see graphic). In the context of the EQ-i and Emotional Intelligence (EI), interpersonal skills are critical. EI is a “person’s ability to perceive and manage his/her own emotions in a manner that results in successful interactions with the environment,” according to Dr. Dick Thompson, President and CEO of HPS, Inc. The second part of the definition of EI is where interpersonal relationships come in: “and if others are present, to also perceive and manage their emotions in a manner that results in successful interpersonal interactions.” The ability to build and maintain successful interactions with other people is what interpersonal relationships are all about. At the executive role levels, networking and collaboration are critical to leadership success. Our client learned that if he wanted to be more successful, he had to work with and through others.

Connecting with Others Counts

After the HPS coach talked with him, the manager acknowledged that networking and relationship building were not strengths of his. He wanted to

learn techniques for establishing and maintaining relationships. The first step was that his manager wanted him to be more visible in his industry. Our client was a member of various industry-related professional organizations and networking groups. From a coaching perspective his task was clear cut: go to meetings, participate. He had to get to know key players and make himself known in his industry. Networking was a way for him to build relationships and practice interpersonal skills outside his company.

Our client was also given a goal of collaborating more with internal colleagues. He had a tendency to work on his own, rarely asking for input from his peers. A critical skill for enhancing interpersonal relationships is the ability to collaborate. He began to hold more meetings, asking others to work with him on his projects. He asked his peers for their opinions and ideas on his work.



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EQ-i 2.0 Model

The EQ-i 2.0—the most scientifically-validated EI assessment available—measures the interaction between a person and his or her environment. The power of the instrument is in how the 15 Subscales pinpoint a person’s behaviors and the motivations behind those behaviors. Certified feedback professionals use EQ-i results to help clients understand EI strengths and to provide coaching in areas that require focused attention.

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About the Author

Debra Cannarella is the Director of Operations at High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), a consulting company that provides assessments, consulting and training solutions to help organizations excel. HPS conducts certification training on the EQ-i 2.0 assessment and provides individual, leader and executive coaching to clients.

Contact Debra by email at debra@hpsys.com.

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They, in turn, sought his advice as well. Our client also needed to hone his basic interpersonal skills. By increasing his interactions with others, he was able to practice communication skills and conflict resolution techniques more often. He became a better listener by practicing the use of paraphrasing what others said. He also practiced negotiation and conflict resolution strategies. When his peers began to see that, even as a manager, he didn't always have to get his way, they were more receptive to working with him.

Now that he was working with others more frequently, the HPS coach asked the manager to observe characteristics of other leaders who were successful in interpersonal relationships. He discovered a key insight: they were positive and upbeat, whereas he had a tendency to respond critically to new ideas. When new ideas were presented, his peers were often enthusiastic about the possibilities. They were careful in how they phrased concerns so they didn't come across as negative or pessimistic. Our client identified an opportunity to respond more positively and openly to new ideas. By recognizing a natural tendency to be critical, he was able to employ **Impulse Control** and not speak up too quickly with criticism. His co-workers became more comfortable seeking his feedback, thus enhancing his work relationships even more.

Four Steps that Improve Interpersonal Relationships

If interpersonal relationships are an area of development need, try these four techniques.

Participate in Networking Events. This will help build relationships and connections with people who share a common interest or work in a similar industry or role.



Collaborate with Co-workers on Projects. This is the best way to be known as a team player that other people want to work with.

Improve Interpersonal Skills. Determine which areas need work, and practice different tools and techniques to enhance your skills. Ask a trusted colleague for feedback. Read books or attend training classes to sharpen your skills.

Develop Self-Awareness. You won't be able to change your basic personality, but you can increase awareness of natural tendencies and use techniques to manage impulses and reactions. In our case study, the manager was quick to speak up critically to new ideas. When he recognized this pattern, he found ways to put containment on his **Impulse Control** and **Assertiveness**, and he was able to show positive enthusiasm more easily.

In many organizations, technical skills and job experience will help a leader be successful to a certain point. As leaders continue to move up to higher role levels, they often discover that IQ and technical ability will only take them so far. Being skilled in building and maintaining relationships with others will have a significant impact on success at senior manager and executive role levels.

Contact HPS to Learn More About the EQ-i 2.0 and Certification Training
Visit HPS online at www.hpsys.com or call 800.535.8445.