

# Why Your Coworkers Lack Emotional Intelligence

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

If you are an emotionally intelligent manager, you work hard to have good relationships with your direct reports and are rewarded by your employer for doing so. You pick up on the moods of your people, and you've mastered the art of using your team's collective feelings—both the sour and the irrationally exuberant—to create positive change and encourage constructive collaboration. When your team needs to come together under the gun, you use your well-honed emotional intelligence (EQ) to get results.

But what if you aren't the manager?

That was the question posed recently by researcher Michael Milillo. According to the Academy of Management, 79% of Fortune 1000 companies operate with self-directed teams not led by a formal manager. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in the fast-paced world of Silicon Valley, where Milillo resides. Nearly all competitive high-tech enterprises have self-directed teams baked right into their DNA—they simply cannot afford to let bureaucracy and hierarchy gum up their innovation engines. On these self-directed teams, technical prowess reigns supreme. So, it seems like a good idea to choose the team member with the most technical know-how to lead the group.

In recent years, however, Milillo and others have observed that progress often stalls when the technical whiz takes over as leader. Why wouldn't the best engineer on the team be the best person to lead a team of engineers? With innovation driving the bottom line, you'd think that Silicon Valley companies would benefit from having their best minds behind the wheel.

## The Discovery

To find out, Milillo gathered two samples of professionals—one set of managers and one set of informal team leaders without “manager” titles—from one of the world's leading high-tech companies in Silicon Valley. He then administered the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® test to both groups. Milillo discovered that those without manager titles scored significantly lower in overall emotional intelligence than the formal managers. These informal team leaders also scored well below the formal managers on three of the four EQ skills—self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. They had trouble with things like “tolerating frustration,” “resisting the desire to speak or act when it won't help the situation,” “picking up on the mood in a room,” and “handling conflict effectively.” Is it any wonder that informal team leaders, who lack these skills, struggle to lead their teams effectively?

What's the prudent thing for the company in Milillo's study to do? Should it restrict team leadership to those holding formal management titles and risk a slowdown in technological progress? With scores on the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® a significant indicator of job performance for employees at all levels, the company would be ill advised to sweep Milillo's findings under the rug.

Milillo's most disturbing finding was that the managers' and non-managers' scores were equal for self-awareness. It seems the non-managers were aware of their deficiencies but unwilling to correct them. They were unwilling because they hadn't been properly motivated. Most organizations unwittingly create the impression

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that working on your EQ is the sole responsibility of management—whose job performance hinges on how they interact with others. These organizations dedicate the vast majority (if not all) of their EQ training and development programs to management. It's hard to get motivated to do something when your employer hasn't brought it to your attention and/or let you know that it's an important part of your job.

Reserving EQ skill development programs for managers perpetuates an unspoken belief in the workplace: If you don't supervise others and your emotional outbursts aren't creating a hostile work environment, your EQ is not a factor. This message isn't isolated to Silicon Valley, or even to companies with self-directed teams. It's a silent killer of performance that's prevalent in all types of organizations. Since EQ is a significant factor in the job performance of employees at all levels—including engineers—your coworkers' EQ skills will continue to suffer as long as your company treats them like they're unimportant.

## The Solution

Milillo concluded that higher emotional intelligence for everyone is the only answer. By increasing the EQ of all *members* of the self-directed teams—not just the informal team leaders—the teams operate as more effective, cohesive units.

By participating in the study, the team leaders Milillo assessed were already on their way to higher EQs. Unlike most assessments, the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® that they were given includes a complete, e-learning based EQ skill development program which tackles two

of the three necessary components of any successful EQ skill development initiative. The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® is priced and constructed so that it can be used affordably to bring EQ to an entire organization, but it won't address the final piece of the EQ skill development puzzle (see #3 below). No product can. True, organization-wide development of EQ skills requires a genuine belief from above that EQ skills are critical to the success of each and every employee—because emotional intelligence in the workplace, like all important things in life, can't be bought or sold.

The three steps to a higher organization-wide EQ:

- 1. Diagnose the Problem.** The development of EQ skills must include an accurate assessment of each individual's EQ. The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® used in Milillo's study takes just seven minutes to complete and measures both overall EQ and each of the four core EQ skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Scores are derived from a normative sample of more than 500,000 individuals.
- 2. Create an Action Plan and Take Action.** Emotional intelligence doesn't develop overnight, but it can be improved over the course of weeks and months with the help of a detailed action plan. In addition to broad scores, the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® identifies specific problem areas within each EQ skill and provides a detailed, step-by-step process for improving in these areas to increase EQ. E-learning activities and detailed strategies provide the practice necessary to form new, productive habits.
- 3. Reinforce the Message.** Last but certainly not least, employees must have support from the system

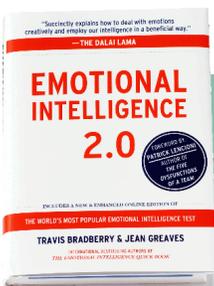
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to increase their EQ skills. Making emotional intelligence “stick” requires encouragement from the surrounding culture. If you want employees to work on their EQ skills, they have to know that EQ isn’t just the flavor of the month, but rather a set of skills that is imperative to the success of the organization and their own job performance. This won’t happen unless regular performance feedback discussions include information on how well they are doing at applying emotional intelligence within their daily roles. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* and the cofounder of TalentSmart, the world’s leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. Dr. Bradberry has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company, Inc.*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Harvard Business Review*.



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