



## Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Intelligence (EQ) Effect

Why is being smart not enough?

How can mastering emotions unlock potential?

**T**he ability to understand, manage, and use emotions effectively determines success more than one's brainpower or Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Research points to EQ as a key factor in both personal and professional achievement. This article explores how developing EQ can improve decision-making, strengthen relationships, and build the emotional resilience needed for long-term success.

## Defining EQ

EQ is the ability to understand and manage one's emotions as well as the ability to recognize and influence the emotions of others. EQ refers to the nature and characteristics of an individual's emotional experiences, including the intensity, range, and impact on behavior and interactions. Developing a high EQ increases one's self-awareness and builds relationships that bring out the best in everyone.

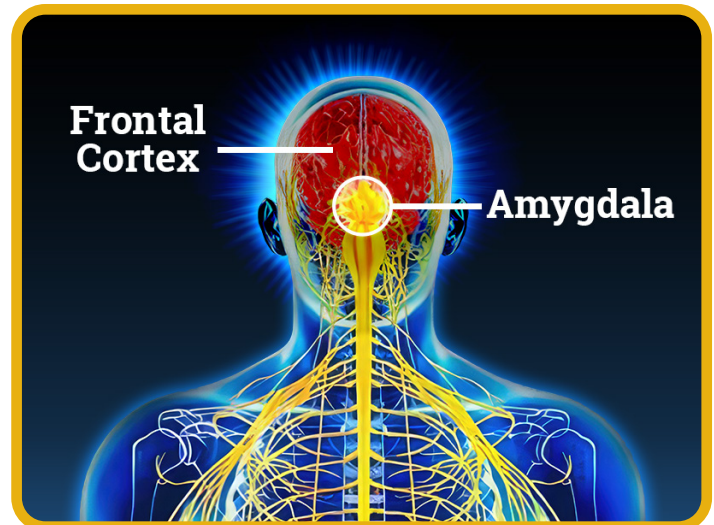
## The Mind-Body Connection

Physical, mental, and emotional states are interconnected and impact each other. Essentially, emotions are not limited to the mind. They can also have immediate and significant impacts on the body, and the body's reactions to emotions can also have an impact on mental states.

Every time a person feels an emotion, a small brain structure called the amygdala, sends information that can have certain effects on the body. For example, fear drops body temperature, especially in the hands and feet. Fear causes the skin to feel clammy and cold by rerouting blood to the core organs in anticipation of the fight-or-flight reaction.

Anxiety can cause body temperature to rise or fall. In response, the body can produce sweat, which cools the body, and release adrenaline, which may warm the center while keeping the extremities frigid. Happiness causes a little rise in body temperature, giving one a cozy feeling. Happiness and other positive emotions encourage relaxation and improved blood flow, which produces warmth.

This interdependence of emotions and the body emphasizes how crucial it is to manage one's physical and mental health in order to maintain total well-being.



A body heat map of Fear and Happiness, regulated by the Amygdala



EQ plays a larger role than IQ in determining how successful we are personally and professionally.

Ms. Laurie Hanley, Resiliency Officer  
Cryptologic Warfare Group SIX

## Components of EQ

EQ is made up of five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These work together to help individuals understand and manage emotions effectively in themselves and others.

### Self-Awareness: Recognizing Emotions

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's moods, emotions, and motivations, as well as their effect on others. Emotionally intelligent people understand their own strengths and weaknesses and perceive themselves as others do. While many people believe they can accurately identify emotions, most do not.

Ms. Laurie Hanley explains, people “. . . have thousands of thoughts every day, but the vast majority of them are happening under the surface.”

To develop self-awareness, a person must recognize emotions as well as notice how moods impact others. Being able to admit when something is difficult, stay calm under pressure, and remain open to feedback furthers one’s self-awareness.

For Sailors, honest self-assessment includes acknowledging personal limitations while also recognizing internal resources, skills, and capabilities. Reexamining one’s Warrior Ethos can help determine whether emotional responses align with Navy and personal core values.

Ways to strengthen self-awareness include naming emotions, journaling, and practicing mindfulness. Becoming comfortable with one’s emotional response patterns is essential for personal growth, leadership, and effective teamwork. To understand an emotion and its effects, Ms. Hanley suggests recalling a strong emotion, reflecting on the event that triggered it, identifying associated emotions, noting physical responses, and then examining one’s thoughts and behaviors.



A brain-shaped control panel powered ON with levers and indicators labeled Suppression, Self-Regulation, Expression, Emotional Overuse, and Healthy Balance illuminated and active

### Suppression vs. Expression

While emotions themselves are neither good nor bad, their impact depends on how individuals choose to respond to them.

The most typical method people use to deal with their emotions is through suppression by keeping feelings to themselves or acting as though they are not distressed. Suppressing emotions means consciously pushing feelings out of awareness to avoid expressing or experiencing them.

While this might offer short-term control, not acknowledging or addressing emotions can lead to increased stress, reduced resilience, and negative impacts on mental and physical health. However, there are times when suppressing emotion is necessary, such as in a professional

setting, in conflict de-escalation, or during critical events.

Expression is nearly the opposite of suppression. While expressing emotions can be healthy, doing so impulsively or without awareness of context can have negative consequences. Spontaneous, illogical, and uncontrollable emotional outbursts may lead to misunderstandings, damage relationships, or escalate conflict, especially if emotions like anger or frustration are expressed inappropriately or at the wrong time.

In an emergency, Sailors need to stay focused and follow their training. Some situations require showing strong emotions, especially when responding to urgent safety concerns, such as yelling at someone who is about to act in a way that could endanger themselves or others is necessary to prevent harm.



A Sailor standing steady on a rock in a storm

## Self-Regulation: Managing Responses

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, control impulses, and respond intentionally under pressure. Developing this skill involves pausing before reacting, adopting flexible thinking, and shifting perspective to reduce the impact of emotions. Using key strategies such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and sensory grounding can support this process and help maintain composure in challenging situations.

Instead of reacting defensively, a Sailor can listen calmly to feedback and consider how to improve. They can avoid panic if equipment fails during an emergency drill by recognizing their own stress, taking a deep breath, and then responding calmly. Cognitive reframing and positive self-talk turn “Everyone is out to get me” into “My team needs the best from me.” These tools help Sailors become comfortable with uncertainty, view challenges constructively, and manage stress effectively, further strengthening their resilience.

Self-regulation also means staying grounded in personal values, holding oneself accountable, and practicing gratitude. By responding rather

than reacting, Sailors enhance decision-making, teamwork, and their ability to perform under pressure.

## Motivation: Achieving Goals

Motivation drives individuals to achieve for the sake of accomplishment, fueled by a purpose greater than personal gain. It reflects a mindset rooted in sacrificial service, putting the mission and others before self. Emotionally intelligent Sailors pursue their goals with energy, persistence, and a sense of duty. They practice optimism and remain hopeful and confident in their efforts, even when facing setbacks.

With strong EQ, Sailors build the adaptability needed to stay motivated under pressure. When the initial drive fades, commitment becomes a deliberate decision to press forward despite fear, fatigue, or doubt. EQ helps Sailors regulate emotions, stay focused, and maintain the discipline needed to lead and perform in demanding conditions.

By identifying their why, Sailors unlock intrinsic motivation and strengthen emotional resilience. A clear sense of purpose enables them to reframe challenges, manage negative emotions, and stay connected to their commitment. This inner drive, grounded in sacrificial service and fueled by optimism, sustains high performance and toughness in the face of adversity.



When we are grateful for things, it helps us to put them in perspective. And when we have perspective, it makes managing our feelings much easier.

Ms. Laurie Hanley, Resiliency Officer  
Cryptologic Warfare Group SIX



A Sailor showing empathy by listening to another Sailor

## Empathy: Understanding Others

Empathy is the ability to understand the emotional states of others and consider their feelings, especially when making decisions. Emotionally intelligent Sailors use empathy to recognize and appropriately respond to others' emotions, strengthening relationships and building trust within teams. They put themselves in someone else's position, pay close attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues, and acknowledge emotions with genuine concern.



We need to look not just at ourselves, but to look outward and put our mindfulness and attention into understanding the feelings of others.

Ms. Laurie Hanley, Resiliency Officer  
Cryptologic Warfare Group SIX

Empathy begins with self-awareness. A person must first understand their own emotions before they can accurately read and respond to the emotions of others. To build empathy, they stay present, listen attentively without judgment, and recognize emotions they have experienced themselves. They ask open-ended questions, repeat key points to show understanding, and seek clarification when needed instead of making assumptions.

Empathetic people use supportive language and tone, and they look for common ground to deepen connection. By reflecting what they have heard and responding with care and clarity, they help others feel seen, heard, and valued. Showing empathy fosters stronger relationships and emotionally intelligent environments.

## Social Skills: Building Relationships

Social skills center on the ability to manage relationships, build networks, find common ground, and develop rapport.



A Sailor building a brick wall anchored by EQ skills and techniques

## Improving EQ

Emotionally intelligent Sailors manage their emotions to stay composed in challenging situations, build relationships, and respond more effectively. They develop their EQ skills with consistent practice.

Mindfulness builds self-awareness, journaling helps process emotions, and feedback from peers offers insight into emotional responses and their impact. Techniques like deep breathing, pausing before reacting, and cognitive reframing support emotional regulation. Recognizing stress signals and responding intentionally helps individuals stay grounded.

Strong EQ also involves listening attentively, reading verbal and nonverbal cues, and practicing empathy. Skills like collaboration, conflict resolution, and perspective-taking improve communication and team cohesion. Setting Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely (SMART) goals can focus personal growth, while regular exercise, rest, and emotional check-ins support long-term emotional balance and performance.

Individuals with strong social skills communicate clearly, listen actively, and show empathy in their interactions. They navigate conflict effectively, offer praise when appropriate, and maintain emotional control, which helps foster trust and respect.

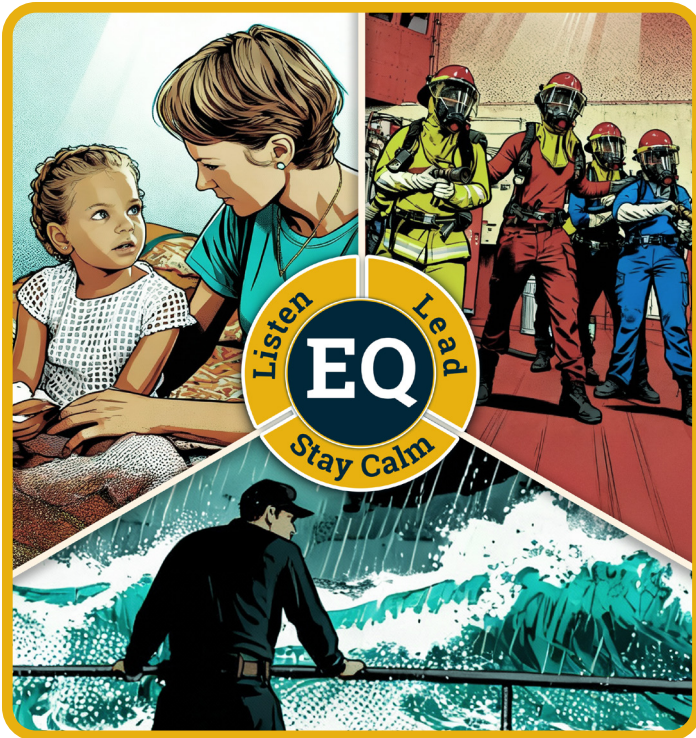
Emotionally intelligent people, especially leaders, use social skills to influence others, inspire collaboration, and create a supportive, high-functioning environment. Their ability to connect with others on both emotional and practical levels strengthens team cohesion and boosts overall performance.

By setting healthy boundaries and caring for their own emotional well-being, they avoid burnout and lead with

consistency and clarity.

For example, a Sailor notices rising tension between two shipmates during a debrief and calmly intervenes to acknowledge the stress and redirect the conversation. By creating space for respectful dialogue, the Sailor defuses the conflict and helps restore team cohesion, demonstrating strong social awareness and EQ.

Developing social skills requires self-awareness, intentional practice, and a willingness to grow from feedback. When Sailors cultivate these skills, they build stronger relationships, enhance morale, and drive positive change through trust, communication, and mutual respect.



A Sailor listening to a child; a Sailor leading a team; a Sailor on a ship in a storm; a centered EQ logo labeled Listen, Lead, Stay Calm

## Bringing Out the Best

EQ enables individuals to stay calm under pressure, reduce team stress, resolve conflicts, and build stronger relationships. These skills contribute to greater job satisfaction and mission success. For Sailors, a high EQ directly improves how they experience, express, and manage emotions, which in turn shapes behavior, teamwork, and leadership.

By developing self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, individuals become better shipmates, family members, and citizens. Recognizing and reevaluating emotional responses builds resilience and strengthens personal and professional performance.

When individuals master their emotions and understand others, they foster trust and connection, which is essential for building high-performing, cohesive teams. EQ is not just a personal asset; it is a force multiplier that helps everyone bring out the best in themselves and those around them.

## Sea Story

Commander Eva Rostova, the squadron's CO, noticed the tension simmering in the ready room late on Friday afternoon. A recent string of minor setbacks had clearly frayed nerves. Instead of issuing a sharp, top-down directive demanding better focus, she recognized her own impatience (self-awareness) and consciously tempered her approach (self-regulation).

Sensing the underlying stress rather than just seeing mistakes (empathy), she initiated informal conversations with several junior officers and senior enlisted leaders. She listened more than she spoke, acknowledging their frustrations and validating the pressure they felt (social skills).

By understanding their perspective and collaboratively discussing potential adjustments to workflow rather than assigning blame, Commander Rostova defused the tension, fostering a sense of shared purpose and boosting morale more effectively than any stern order could have, setting a more positive tone for the coming week.



I continue to motivate myself to improve my EQ and my team's EQ so that all of us can function as a more cohesive unit.

CMDCM Bob Stumm

## Wrap-Up

EQ involves key behaviors such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills that enable individuals to understand themselves and others better.

Developing these skills helps Sailors navigate challenges with resilience, strengthen teamwork, and lead with greater effectiveness. By building EQ, they enhance personal growth and drive success across all areas of their lives.



Warrior Toughness EQ infographic

For more information, check out the videos and podcast about EQ.



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**WARRIOR TOUGHNESS**