How To Exceed Your Goals In 2016

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

For many of us, 2016 begins with a promise—a promise that this year we will accomplish that which has eluded us. Often it’s the everyday things that prove most difficult—managing your schedule, treating people the way you ought to, and keeping things in perspective when chaos is at hand.

The sad truth is that nearly 80% of us will fall off the resolution bandwagon by Super Bowl Sunday; and by this time next year, a mere 5% of us will have succeeded in reaching our goals.

There are two reasons why we’re so bad at reaching our goals:

The first is that we bite off more than we can chew. It may seem reasonable to pick up three or four new skills to add to your repertoire, but that’s an expectation the mind can’t execute. When we try to develop too many new skills at once, they become competing priorities that leave us distracted, discouraged and overwhelmed.

The second reason most self-improvement efforts are doomed to fail is that our emotions have a nasty habit of hijacking our behavior. Without a strong ability to recognize and manage our emotions as they occur, old habits are sure to die hard.

Why The Good News

The good news is that you can address both problems and make the changes you desire by resolving this year to develop a single skill—emotional intelligence (EQ).

Piles of research over the last two decades has shown that emotional intelligence is likely the single most powerful success factor yet discovered, affecting everything from your performance at work, to your mood and the quality of your personal life.

We’ve tested emotional intelligence alongside 33 other critical skills and found that it subsumes the majority of them. It’s no wonder that 90% of top performers are high in EQ and people with high EQs make $28,000 more annually than their low EQ counterparts.

But how does emotional intelligence play such a large role in so many important skills? Our brains are wired such that emotions are the root of all human behavior. Whether we’re aware of it or not, the motivation behind every action (no matter how small) is inherently emotional.

Here’s how it works:

All of your primary senses enter at the base of your brain (the light blue shaded area below). Before you can think rationally about what you’re experiencing, these signals must travel through the limbic system—the place where emotions are generated. This ensures you have an emotional reaction to events first.

Emotional intelligence ensures effective communication between the rational and emotional centers of your brain. As you improve your emotional intelligence, you improve your ability to understand and control the primary
motivations for your behavior, which reaps dividends in everything you do every day. Emotional intelligence is powerful and efficient—it allows you to focus your energy on a single skill with tremendous results.

What Does Emotional Intelligence Look Like?

Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results. Emotional intelligence is made up of four core skills that pair up under two primary competencies: personal competence and social competence.

**Personal competence** comprises your self-awareness and self-management skills, which focus more on you individually than on your interactions with other people. Personal competence is your ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies.

- **Self-Awareness** is your ability to accurately perceive your emotions and stay aware of them as they happen.

**Social competence** is made up of your social awareness and relationship management skills; social competence is your ability to understand other people’s moods, behavior, and motives in order to respond effectively and improve the quality of your relationships.

- **Social Awareness** is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people and understand what is really going on. your ability to accurately perceive your emotions and stay aware of them as they happen.

- **Relationship Management** is your ability to use awareness of your emotions and the others’ emotions to manage interactions successfully.

While working on your emotional intelligence will improve a lot of different skills, there are five in particular that people tend to set goals around when the year changes. I’ll explain how you can improve each of these skills solely by focusing on your emotional intelligence.

**Time Management**

In this age of abundance, time is the one thing nobody has enough of. Perhaps that’s why Google receives 111 million searches a month for Time Management. Few people recognize how time management depends upon the emotional intelligence skills of self-management and relationship management.

Creating a good schedule is a very rational thing, but sticking to that schedule is decidedly emotional. Many of us start out every day with the best intentions to manage our time wisely. But then we receive a complicated email from a co-worker, a consuming phone call from a friend,
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or otherwise get sidetracked until our well-laid plans go up in flames. We spend the rest of the day trying to put out somebody else’s fire, or working to resolve issues that weren’t there in the morning. Before you know it, the day is gone and you’re completely off schedule.

When the distractions are your own, sticking to a schedule requires self-management. When the needs of others try to impede upon your plans, it takes effective relationship management to finesse the relationship while ensuring that your priorities are still addressed.

Embracing Change

Show me somebody who claims to love change, and I’ll show you a well-intentioned liar. Change is uncomfortable for everyone at times, and for many of us it makes our skin crawl. Those who apply well-honed self-awareness and self-management skills tolerate change much more successfully than others. Self-awareness enables you to adjust comfortably to change because it gives you the perspective needed to realize when change is coming and how it’s affecting you.

Self-management keeps you cool in the moment—often with a reminder that even the most stable, trusted facets of your life are not completely under your control. Those most averse to change, who possess great self-awareness and self-management skills, even set aside a small amount of time each week to list possible changes and what actions they can take in response.

Assertiveness

Emotional intelligence is commonly mistaken as a synonym for “nice.” In fact, the most emotionally intelligent response is often one where you openly and directly express yourself. To paraphrase Aristotle, getting angry is easy. Getting angry with the right person, at the right time, and to the right degree requires emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence doesn’t allow lashing out, or making yourself into someone else’s doormat. To be assertive, you have to know what you’re feeling, read the other party accurately, and express yourself in a way that garners the best result. People with high EQs do this naturally.

Making Great Decisions

It has taken the world far too long to wake up to the fact that emotions simply cannot—and should not—be ignored when making decisions. Neuroscience shows us that sometimes the most rational thing you can do is trust your emotions when making a decision. But in order to make this work, you have to be aware of the emotions you’re feeling, know why you’re having them, and see how they factor into the situation at hand. Here, there is no substitute for emotional intelligence.

Giving Outstanding Presentations

Few things strike primal fear in people like standing under the spotlight in a room full of people. Even the most eloquent among us can be reduced to spewing verbal garbage once the sheer anxiety of public speaking takes hold. That’s why a knock-‘em-dead presenter’s most inspiring presentation is often the one he delivers to himself. A bit of positive self-talk—reminding himself of all the times he has succeeded and how qualified he is to speak on the topic—enables the effective speaker to use his performance anxiety to sharpen his focus and make him more articulate. If you think that’s silly, then you probably haven’t tried it. Emotional intelligence doesn’t just make you aware of your emotions; it equips you with strategies for keeping them from holding you back.
Bringing It All Together

Give improving your emotional intelligence a real shot in 2016. You'll be surprised where it takes you.

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning coauthor 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.