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“How would I describe myself? Three words: hardworking, alpha male, jackhammer . . . merciless . . . insatiable.”

— DWIGHT SCHRUTE

whitepaper

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN *THE OFFICE*?

By Dr. Travis Bradberry

Have you ever worked for someone who made you scratch your head and wonder, “How did he get to be the boss?” Does the guy in the next cubicle proclaim his greatness on a daily basis? When five o’clock strikes, are you just thankful you made it through the day without telling that rigid, unyielding controller how you really feel about her? If so, you aren’t alone, and might even be one of the millions of Americans who tune in each week to NBC’s *The Office*.

If you have yet to see an episode of *The Office*, it’s a mockumentary of the daily events at a fictional paper company, Dunder Mifflin. The boss, Michael Scott, is a delusional manager who leads a team of average Joes that most any professional can relate to. The show depicts a working environment that, like many offices, holds people who are offbeat, often politically incorrect, and at times incredibly insensitive. While some might dismiss *The Office* as sarcastic and crude, it mirrors the real workplace enough that we can learn something important from it, so long as we can stop laughing long enough to pay attention. Like most offices, there is a single element of the human psyche that goes missing long enough to create chaos. The culprit? Emotional intelligence (EQ). Let’s take a look at the emotional intelligence profiles of some of *The Office*’s key players to learn how they contribute.



“Actually, I didn’t think it was appropriate to invite children since it’s, uh, you know . . . there’s gambling and alcohol . . . and it’s in our dangerous warehouse . . . it’s a school night, and you know, uh . . . Hooters is catering. You know, is that not—is that enough? Should I keep going?” — **TOBY FLENDERSON**

If you can get past the clichéd depiction of the human resources representative as a corporate lackey whose sole purpose is to wander the halls making sure everyone is following the rules, there is a valuable EQ lesson to be learned from Toby. You see, like most of us, Toby is far better at using his EQ when responding to other people’s problems. He approaches other people’s miscues—even the outlandish acts perpetrated by branch manager Michael Scott—objectively. When the sticky situation is his own, Toby’s emotions take control of his behavior. Hijacked by his emotions, Toby loses the balancing effects of his reason and ends up behaving just as badly as the rest of his coworkers in *The Office*.



\* All scores are based on a 1- to 100- point scale, with average scores in the 70s and above average scores in the 80s and 90s.



## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN *THE OFFICE*?

"There is always a distance between a boss and the employees. It is just nature's rule. It's intimidation, mostly; it's the awareness that they are not me." — **MICHAEL SCOTT**

Watch any episode of *The Office*, and Michael's deficiencies in EQ are in plain view. Since Michael is the manager of the Scranton branch, Michael's boss is hundreds of miles away, and he takes full advantage of the freedom by doing, well, whatever he wants. His biggest problem? Michael suffers from a tremendous lack of self-awareness, so even when he's trying to do right by his employees his actions are muddled by his own self-interest. Couple this with his inability to self-manage, and you have a Scranton manager who doesn't recognize when his own behavior is problematic and isn't able to stop himself in the rare instance that he knows better. Want to see Michael in action? Click on Michael's name badge to see his inability to manage relationships with his employees.



Michael's Overall EQ = 54

SELF- 50  
AWARENESS

SELF- 46  
MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL 69  
AWARENESS

RELATIONSHIP 51  
MANAGEMENT

PERSONAL COMPETENCE

SOCIAL COMPETENCE

"I am ready to face any challenges that might be foolish enough to face me."

— **DWIGHT SCHRUTE**

Where do we begin with Dwight? The first thing people notice in this assistant to the branch manager is he's a kiss-up. He fawns over Michael, seemingly indifferent to his coworkers' (and even Michael's) irritation. Dwight is actually quite good at sticking to his guns, but his lack of social awareness means he doesn't comprehend the significance of his coworkers' ire. The result? Dwight is a top-notch employee when working alone and an utter failure in any task that requires cooperation. As the office nerd, his coworkers could reject him over his love of *Lazer Tag* and *Battlestar Galactica*, but they don't have to. He earns no respect from his colleagues because he doesn't expend any effort in understanding them. Dwight is so lacking in social awareness that the rare attempt to connect with his coworkers is doomed to failure. Click on Dwight's badge to watch how socially unaware he can be.



Dwight's Overall EQ = 58

SELF- 61  
AWARENESS

SELF- 72  
MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL 51  
AWARENESS

RELATIONSHIP 47  
MANAGEMENT

PERSONAL COMPETENCE

SOCIAL COMPETENCE



## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN *THE OFFICE*?



"Right now, this is just a job. If I advance any higher in this company, then this would be my career. And well, if this were my career, I'd have to throw myself in front of a train."

— JIM HALPERT

Jim is the guy everyone in the office naturally gravitates to; he's easy-going, affable, and good at reading people. While Jim's overall EQ is well above average, he is far from perfect. Self-awareness poses the biggest challenge. Jim often does things he later regrets because he's swept up by a wave of emotion (think of the "booze cruise" when he let Michael in on his feelings for Pam). Jim even struggles with guilt over his favorite office pastime—pulling pranks on Dwight. Why would Jim feel remorse about fooling Dwight? Perhaps Jim doesn't fully realize how messing with Dwight is his sole source of sanity beyond Pam, and he can't come to terms with the fact that he's in a thankless job he should have quit long ago. Click on Jim's badge to see just how elaborate his pranks on Dwight have become.



"You know what they say about a car wreck where it's so awful you can't look away?

The Dundeers are like a car wreck that you have to stare at because your boss is making you."

— PAM BEESLY

Pam holds the other high EQ in the office. She is kind, considerate, and socially adept. Her only weakness is that she lacks assertiveness. While this passivity helps to smooth things over between her typically abrasive office mates, it holds her back personally and professionally. Pam languished in a dead-end office romance with Roy—a guy who made it clear during their three-year engagement that he didn't respect her. Their relationship continued so long as Pam was uncomfortable speaking her mind to make sure her needs get met. In recent episodes, Pam has started taking more assertive steps with Roy and the others in the office. If she continues pursuing what's right for her (and can tolerate the inevitable backlash from coworkers accustomed to bowling her over), she'll fully harness the power of emotional intelligence to realize her dreams. Click on Pam's badge to watch her smoothly handle a difficult conversation with a coworker.

