

How Successful People Beat Stress and Avoid Burnout



In times of extreme change, like we've faced the last couple of months, negative emotions begin to multiply and intensify. Emotions like anxiety, fear, and frustration can even begin to feel baked into our everyday lives.

A recent [survey](#) of American workers during COVID-19 reported the following:

–70% of employees say that COVID-19 is the most stressful time ever in their working career

–88% of employees say they're experiencing moderate stress or worse

–62% of stressed employees say they lose at least an hour of productivity per day

When stress and negative emotions begin to take over on a daily basis, burnout waits just around the corner. [Burnout](#) saps confidence, positivity, and energy. It kills productivity and creativity, and it's been linked to serious, long-term emotional and physical health issues. According to a SHRM survey, burnout is also one of the top reasons people leave jobs.

The interesting thing about burnout is that even though all people experience stress and negative emotions, not everyone burns out in response. It's possible to navigate high stakes, long hours, and looming disasters in a way that protects you from emotional capsizing.

Emotional Intelligence Skills Protect People From Burnout

In a [study](#) of Chief Medical Officers (CMOs), an exceptionally high-stress position, almost all of the CMOs rated their stress as “severe, very severe, or worst possible.” The researchers, who specialize in studying stress and burnout, noticed something unusual about the CMOs. Even though they experienced heavier levels of stress than most people, the majority still did not burn out. Instead, they had developed effective coping mechanisms through years of managing their excessive stress loads. Their coping mechanisms shared a common theme: emotional intelligence (EQ).

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships. EQ is made up of four core skills, and each one plays a critical role in stress management:

Self-Awareness is your ability to accurately perceive your emotions and stay aware of them as they happen. The researchers found that the Chief Medical Officers were skilled at recognizing when they felt anxious or stressed. Once they recognized a negative emotion, they didn't stop there. They traced the feeling back to its source (like a tight deadline or a specific conflict with a colleague). This allowed them to understand not only *what* they were feeling but also *why* they felt that way. Getting specific about your emotions is one of the best ways to overcome that vague and shallow circulation of negative thoughts we experience when stressed. Specificity gives you control over time and place for your reaction. It frees you up to separate your fears or anxieties from your actual work and actions. Without awareness of your emotions, you can't manage them.

Self-Management is your ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and direct your behavior in a positive way. For the CMOs, self-management influenced *how* they dealt with their anxieties and stress as well as how they avoided impulsive decisions or destructive tendencies. Self-management can come in a number of forms. For many people, self-managing against stress works best when they return to the basics—things like exercise, sleep hygiene, connecting to close friends, eating healthy, or meditating. At peak self-management, the CMOs even leveraged their stress as a motivator to perform highly under pressure.

Social Awareness is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people. One big source of stress at work is conflict with others, especially when the conflicts aren't handled with sensitivity. When faced with high-stakes conflicts, the CMOs made an extra effort to understand the experience of others. By empathizing during a conflict, they could more effectively negotiate resolutions that met the needs of multiple parties, not just their own.

Relationship Management is the ability to use awareness of your emotions and others' to manage successful interactions. Relationship management skills are essential in navigating the emotional complexities of difficult conversations, like conflicts, bad news, significant changes, or tough feedback. It was the CMOs' relationship management skills that helped them create an environment of trust with their teams. This meant they were comfortable asking for help when they felt overwhelmed or stretched to their limits.

From Insights to Actions

High EQ behaviors like this prevent burnout and benefit the medical officer, the team's performance and retention for the organization. While most of us aren't CMOs, we can still apply their approach to stress in our own work. Their strategies for stress management are adjusted over years of stressful tests at work. By understanding their use of emotionally intelligent practices, you can also begin to take control of your own stress and build your EQ in the process!

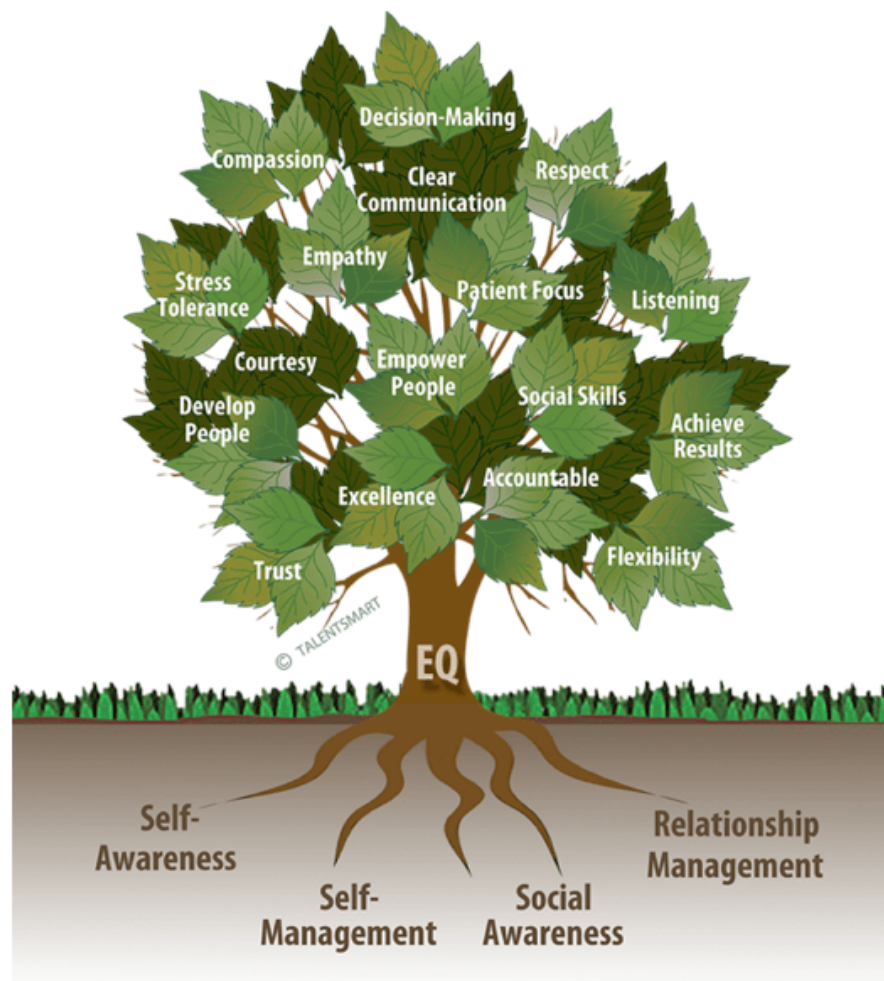
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Why Emotional Intelligence is the Most Critical Skill Needed Right Now



Emotions impact essentially everything we do, think, and say, and for this reason, a whole set of critical business skills are all enhanced by emotional intelligence (EQ). Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in ourselves and others, and our ability to use this awareness to manage our behavior and relationships. By training for EQ, organizations aren't just touching on a single skill, they're growing an entire set of desired skills and competencies.

Emotional Intelligence Skills Enhance In-demand Business Skills. In early 2020, LinkedIn published its Workplace Learning report from 4,932 respondents (managers, learners and budget decisionmakers). Not only did emotional intelligence make the top 5 soft skills list, but each of the top three in-demand business skills are also enhanced by emotional intelligence. When organizations invest in helping employees and leaders understand and manage their emotions productively, the entire workforce is better equipped to grow skills critical to the business.



In-Demand Skill: Leadership & Management: Strong leaders and managers have to understand where their people are coming from—their strengths, motivators, personalities—and leverage these to inspire, influence, mentor and motivate. High EQ leaders and managers interact effectively with others. In a TalentSmart [study](#) on leadership, we found a direct link between high EQ and transformational leadership.

In-Demand Skill: Creative Problem-solving: Creative problem-solving requires the ability to step away from usual or safe options into the unknown and requires loose collaboration, a feeling of safety, and a willingness to fail. Self-aware employees can recognize their hesitancy to push boundaries. They self-manage by pushing through their discomfort to overcome feeling hesitant. High EQ teams invest in relationships, where people work to build trust, strip away judgment, and encourage each other to share and be genuine.

In-Demand Skill: Communication: To get an idea across to other people, working professionals have to know their audience, notice how people respond, and adjust in the moment to convey the message. Self-aware communicators better understand the impact of their words, body language, and tone. Communicating with social awareness skills means listening better and understanding where others are coming from. They pay attention to their audience's body language and response for insights into what others are really saying or feeling.

From Insights To Action: A pleasant surprise about EQ is that employees can increase their emotional intelligence skills through conscious practice and development. By learning what EQ is and how it applies to the challenges they face, they take a big first step toward self-awareness. Try our [self-assessment](#), which allows your employees to evaluate their current EQ and practice three recommended EQ strategies.

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Why Humor is a Key to Success



“If we couldn’t laugh we would all go insane.”

—Robert Frost

Whenever tough times sweep in, humor follows close behind. And the last couple of months have certainly been no exception.

After closing down from visitors, the prestigious British Royal Academy of Arts issued a “ham drawing contest” that resulted in a bizarre display of ham drawing prowess across the country (a ham hunched over a desk working, a set of Dalí hams resembling the famous melting clocks painting, and even a tattoo of a ham on one man’s thumb). In true comedic form, comedians Sam Morril and Taylor Tomlinson moved in together and began producing an entire comedy show called “New Couple Gets Quarantined.” There’s also a *New York Times* therapist who shared in her article that more and more of her patients take virtual therapy calls seated on the toilet to ensure privacy. One, she said, even

had a breakthrough when they accidentally bumped the flusher mid-conversation and laughed for the first time in a month. The list of strange, funny, and complex responses to social distancing could honestly be a book in and of itself.

To state the obvious, jokes like these happen during difficult times, because they make us feel good. They pull us away from negative thinking and into a more positive space. In the workplace especially, humor and a lighter environment benefit people and companies far beyond the moment of laughter. Here are three key benefits humor brings to the workplace.

Humor is an antidote to stress. Humor doesn't just temporarily alleviate stress, it lightens your load mentally and physically. [Laughter](#) triggers a release of endorphins, increases oxygen intake and circulation, and relaxes your muscles. One [study](#) found that people who turned to humor in a difficult time were more likely to experience a shift in perspective as they realized different ways of viewing their problems and failures. Another [study](#) found that using humor to help a struggling colleague can build feelings of social support and trust. However, a word to the wise: research also shows that too much self-deprecating humor can backfire and make you more stressed.

Humor builds teams. When the British Royal Academy surprised everyone with the ham challenge purely for the sake of fun, people responded with surprisingly creative takes. The nonchalance and humor of the post loosened up the atmosphere, and the creativity followed. The same thing happens on the team level at organizations. Research shows that [teams](#) that joke and approach work in a playful manner build solidarity, trust, and a safe atmosphere where people feel they can be creative and genuine. The result is that each team member feels empowered, less tied down to a strict hierarchy.

Humor exudes confidence.

"It is a curious fact that people are never so trivial as when they take themselves seriously." –Oscar Wilde

When Dick Costolo accepted the job as Chief Operating Officer of Twitter, he quickly fired off a tweet: "First full day as Twitter COO tomorrow. Task #1: undermine CEO, consolidate power." Costolo's tweet was, of course, a joke. Funnily enough, he also went on to become the CEO years later. Humor has a way of drawing people to you. It humanizes you and shows confidence at the same time. Humor can even

be the deciding factor when it comes to hiring or choosing a group leader. In a UPENN [study](#), participants presented a *Visit Switzerland* campaign to a group of people. Some participants were instructed to conclude with a simple joke: “Travel to Switzerland. The flag is a big plus.” Those presenters were overwhelmingly perceived as more competent. People voted for them to present on behalf of the group. Perhaps most interestingly of all, the researchers found that even when the joke fell flat, the presenter was still rated as more competent. Purely by having the confidence to make the joke, the presenter won favor in the eyes of the group.

From Insight to Action. Humor at work doesn’t have to be forced, where employees get together and tell a daily joke. Leading by example is the best way to spark humor, levity, and creativity in a natural way. The occasional well-timed joke, whether or not it flops, will loosen people up, make everyone a bit more comfortable, and then your team will be well on its way.

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Two Lessons for Building a Resilient Organization



When the first U.S. patient to contract Ebola was admitted to a Texas hospital in 2014, the hospital had no idea it needed to be on alert to respond to something happening a world away. When Thomas Duncan reported he felt better, they sent him home. Sadly, he returned to the hospital in a rapid state of decline, and his case ultimately proved fatal. Two nurses contracted Ebola during treatment, and the hospital mass tested everyone immediately. The nurses recovered, and the virus was contained. Luckily, Ebola didn't spread as readily as COVID-19.

In a 2017 [article](#) from University of Houston's Business School, Dr.'s Elizabeth Anderson-Fletcher and Dusya Vera set out to examine the hospital's response from start to finish. Though their findings did not prevent the outbreak of COVID-19, they do provide important lessons for organizations facing the threat of a sudden change. The actions of the medical team and the hospital were the types all employees and businesses make, especially in a time of crisis, and we can learn a lot by taking a closer look at the lessons learned. Resilience requires being on alert, making decisions quickly and acting fast through ongoing adversity. Here are two important lessons that will help keep all our organizations and staff surviving.

Lesson 1: Resilience Requires Attention + Awareness.

Even though Ebola had been a significant global crisis for ten months, the doctors and nurses overlooked Duncan's case as a possibility because there hadn't yet been one in the United States. A brief note from a nurse mentioned Duncan's travel, but there wasn't a sufficient red flag system to ensure the medical team would attend to it or that the hospital was aware to implement a hold policy for patients traveling from Ebola hotspots.

What We Can Learn: Our tendency is to move fast and rely on habits and past experiences. In *Thinking, Fast And Slow*, psychologist Daniel Kahneman talks about the importance of habits to preserve mental energy. Mental energy is finite and it's not possible to deliberate over everything. This can cause us to overlook things that are important and directly in front of us. By paying more attention and being more broadly aware, people can minimize letting auto-pilot win over significant new information.

Attention + Awareness in Action: Though we've all learned this lesson again with COVID-19, some organizations are demonstrating attention

and awareness early enough. At the outset of the pandemic, the cycling gym Cyclebar East Cob, like all gyms, faced layoffs and total shutdown. Unlike other gyms, Cyclebar looked deliberately at the responses of companies beyond gyms, and they devised a new plan. They reached out to gym members and rented their stationary bikes and equipment directly to them, delivering the sterilized machines by hand.

Lesson 2: Resilience Requires Group Accountability.

Once the US Ebola case was spotted by the media, the organization went on the defensive and publicly blamed the nursing staff. It took the nursing union stepping in swiftly and severely for the key stakeholders to apologize and get back to the problem solving at hand. Had the Ebola outbreak worsened, the hospital and key professions would have been at odds with each other as they faced a heightening crisis.

What We Can Learn: Placing blame creates an “us versus them” mentality within organization walls and focuses attention unhealthily on the past rather than how to proceed now. A resilient culture would encourage doctors, and nurses to notice and talk about errors safely, quickly, and openly, and empower supervisors to assist frontline staff to solve problems together and in the moment. Suspending traditional hierarchy during a crisis allows for direct counsel with those who offer expertise regardless of official title. Group accountability builds trust, communication, and respect across teams and various levels of expertise, and shifts everyone’s focus to the entire situation going forward.

Group Accountability in Action: Dan Price, the CEO of Gravity, a company that processes payments for small businesses, found his company in dire straits these last two months as their small business customers suffered. Price held an all-company meeting in which he openly shared company finances and the kind of cuts necessary to survive without layoffs. Then, he met with employees one at a time for a week straight to discuss potential solutions. As a company, they developed a private form where each employee wrote down what they would feasibly be able to sacrifice in terms of a pay cut in order to help save the company. The system worked. Gravity didn’t lay anyone off, and they made cuts on each employee’s terms. By emphasizing group accountability, Price ensured a unanimous company solution.

Resilience Into Action: Attention + Awareness + Accountability.

The 2014 Ebola crisis lessons each share a kind of tunnel vision and hastiness that ultimately led to bad decisions at key moments. We are all

in our Zoom tunnels making hasty decisions, and we don't yet know their ultimate impact. Next time you find yourself on autopilot or ready to cast blame, try stepping back instead of plunging in. Go for a walk, take a deep breath and consider your situation more broadly, more creatively, and together.

The Importance of Keeping it Light Through Tough Times



Like it has for most people, Covid-19 derailed Levi's established work-life routine in his Brooklyn apartment. A new part of his rearranging work life was that he found himself on daily [TalentSmart](#) Zoom calls in the afternoon. With so much change going on around him, he often logged onto these calls feeling varying degrees of anxiety, loneliness, and stress. But, he noticed that by the time he left the calls, he felt significantly better.

While some of Levi's improved mood could be attributed to the practical elements of the calls (like talking through uncertainty as a group and mastering the remote meeting platform), a lot more of it seemed to stem

from the overall atmosphere. He couldn't help but smile as colleagues sitting in rooms across seven states joked about things like quarantining with a brand-new roommate, growing accidental mullets, putting on a "quarantine fifteen," and letting hygienic and work wear practices vanish. This kind of fun-spirited sharing lightened the mood and brought TalentSmart team members all together. Like magic, he left the calls feeling less stressed-out, more connected to the team, and more prepared to be productive.

A recent [Saint Louis University article](#) reveals why the experience of these seemingly "magical" Zoom calls actually makes a lot of sense. Psychologists Heather Walker and Richard Harvey attributed this type of light working atmosphere to what they call "levity." "Workplace levity" they wrote, "is an uplifting and pleasurable interaction that lacks tension and anxiety." The benefits of levity, they found, extended far beyond a nice moment. Organizations that embraced levity long-term experienced benefits like:

1. improved stress relief.
2. improved attitudes as a result of a sense of belonging, value, and empowerment.
3. increased psychological well-being.
4. increased employee engagement.
5. increased retainment.
6. increased likelihood of employees referring other people to their organization.
7. improved team cohesion.

But before everyone rushes out to implement mandatory pre-meeting jokes, it's worth noting a potentially darker side to all of this. Approached incorrectly, attempted lightness and humor can be detrimental. Think of Michael Scott in *The Office*. He definitely thinks he's pretty funny and light, but in reality, he's a nightmare of a boss with no idea how he impacts the people around him. [Studies](#) confirm that humor used inappropriately in the workplace divides teams, disparages people, and distracts from deadlines and serious topics. Perhaps worst of all, [leaders](#) who disparage others in their humor cause employee disengagement and increased bad behavior.

So the real question is how do you avoid this twisted cousin of levity and create an environment of *authentic* and *consistent* levity?

Well, you need to operate from a foundation of emotional intelligence (EQ). Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand the emotions of yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships. EQ skills allow you to navigate social complexities (like timing and content of humor in meetings) in order to achieve positive results (like laughter, happiness, and collaboration).

On an individual level, people need EQ skills like self-awareness and social awareness to understand how their jokes or digressions come across to others, and they need self-management and relationship management to effectively filter their jokes and digressions according to the current situation and mood. On a team level, high EQ teams establish norms (written and unwritten) around their behavior, and they use these norms to keep each other in check. This way, when a team member's joke or digression is inappropriate in any way, team members feel comfortable lightly calling them out. This builds out a true sense of trust and safety, which allows for an authentic and group-wide sense of levity.

Some Closing Thoughts

Levity can feel a bit intangible, like something a group either has or doesn't have, but in reality, levity is created in a place of trust and respect where everyone is comfortable opening up. Laughter sparks social connections that strengthen team bonds, and emotional intelligence provides teams shared skills and vocabulary as they work to build their own environment of levity.

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The Power of Resilience



At age thirteen, Bethany Hamilton was already deemed a prodigy destined for a career as a pro surfer. During a daily dawn patrol with her best friend Alana Blanchard at a reef break called Tunnels, a fourteen-foot tiger shark attacked her. She immediately lost her left arm to the bite, and by the time doctors stopped her bleeding, she had lost 60% of her blood and gone into hypovolemic shock.

Hamilton barely survived the attack, saved by a surfboard leash tourniquet fashioned by Alana Blanchard's father, and an orthopedic surgeon who rushed to the hospital from a nearby hotel.

Despite surviving the attack, Hamilton now faced body and mind obstacles. She had to start over and adapt to her new normal. A couple days ago, she had been a budding professional athlete. Now, she was trying “to learn how to put her hair up with one hand.”

While a shark attack like this would mark the end of most surfers' careers, Hamilton set out to relearn how to surf. She paddled out for the first time less than a month after the attack—a quicker recovery than a broken arm. Within two years, she won the National Scholastic Surfing Association championship. Since then, she's surfed countless pro contests and has traveled the world surfing renowned waves.

It's tempting to think of Hamilton's rapid recovery as the result of an innate resilience unique to her. But, in her interviews, she doesn't attribute her resilience to anything genetic. Instead, she talks about daily habits that helped her along, things any of us can do while we adapt to our new normal:

She practiced gratitude. "When I lost my arm I was just thankful to be alive and that propelled me to have a more positive mindset." Even at one of her lowest moments, Hamilton found something to be grateful for. Gratitude became a driving practice toward daily positivity. "My mom definitely encouraged me to find things to be thankful for on rough days and just look for the good in tough situations." A substantial amount of research connects gratitude practices like Hamilton's to a mentality of resilience. For example, a George Mason University [study](#) found daily gratitude practice increased people's self-esteem, daily happiness, and intrinsic motivation. Getting started on your own gratitude practice is as simple as setting aside five minutes each day to write a list of the things you're grateful for.

She revisited her goals and values. Resilience includes working through unpleasant tasks and difficult challenges to rise above adversity and ultimately reach an end goal. To avoid succumbing to stress or burning out as you push yourself through your current challenges, it's important to revisit your goals and values. In Hamilton's case, she had to relearn the basics, things she'd already spent five years mastering. On top of that frustration, there was the fear that comes with being the first person to face something. No other pro surfers had one arm. For Hamilton, her values were tied strongly to her faith. "So many doubts, fears and unknowns flooded my world, but the hope I found as a Christian led me to overcome them." As for her goals, she decided that her love of surfing and her desire to compete was far greater than her fear to get back in the water.

She relied on a support network. "I think for all of us there are hard times in life, and maybe we are not facing them now, maybe they have come to pass, or will come in our future, and I just think, 'know that you are loved by the people around you.'" During her recovery, Hamilton received social support from every angle. Her mother encouraged her to stay grateful. Her classmates from church came out to the hospital to support her. Her brothers and her friend Alana Blanchard all encouraged her to continue to surf. For encouragement, Hamilton even reached out to a

surfer she didn't know who had lost his leg and now surfed on a prosthetic. Her father custom built a handle onto her surfboard so she could pop-up more easily with one arm when she caught a wave. The list could go on. [Research](#) shows that social support doesn't just feel good, it actually increases a protein in the brain called BDNF, which neuroscientists describe as "brain fertilizer." BDNF has been found to enhance resilience and curb depressive tendencies. Next time you get the urge to "lone wolf" your way through today's challenges, just remember that the benefits of support transcend the initial fear of reaching out and asking for support.

Putting ideas to practice. We've all found ourselves facing new challenges as a result of COVID-19. While we're struggling ahead, it's possible to treat the challenges during this period as an opportunity to reflect and build new resilience habits for our new future. Just remember, adopting Hamilton's good habits won't "give you resilience" overnight. They are proven daily habits that need to be practiced over time to reap their full benefits.

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3 Ways EQ Can Make Your Team More Agile (Continued)



Two weeks ago, Stephanie Keene and Isaac Budmen, a couple from Syracuse, heard that a coronavirus testing center was set to open nearby. Together, they own and operate a 3-D printing company from their home. Knowing about the ever-worsening shortage of medical supplies, they began experimenting with a 3-D printer to try to produce a medical shield. In a matter of days, they would print 300 shields, enough to stock the entire testing center for opening.

One of the silver linings in the midst of this pandemic has been the clever ways in which people like Keene and Budmen innovate to make a difference.

On a bigger scale, Nike now manufactures face masks, Pernod alcohol distilleries now produce hand sanitizer, and fast-fashion company Zara now produces hospital scrubs.

Whether you're a part of a two-person team operating from your garage, a team of executives at a large-scale organization, or like most of us, a part of a team somewhere in between, every team wants to stay agile and productive through this time of extreme change.

But where do you even begin when your team is newly remote, worried, or unfocused?

To help get your team moving in the right direction, we've chosen three emotionally intelligent strategies teams use to stay agile in the face of change.

They manage their stress. In a [study](#) looking at the effects of stress on a team, researchers found some unsettling results. Stress has the power to entirely shift people's perspective from group-focused to self-focused. In other words, when a team finds itself under a lot of stress, individual members naturally begin to look out for themselves at the expense of the group's performance. Emotionally intelligent teams implement strategies for managing their stress as a group. They do things like hold one-on-one meetings to check in on stressed-out members, take turns sharing how they're feeling about a particularly high-stakes deadline, and emphasize individual self-care via breaks, exercise, and friendly conversations. All of these measures help keep the team on track through stressful periods. For an individual, this may even be the difference between negative emotions taking over and rising to the occasion to produce and adapt.

They may change course readily, but they operate from a stable center. People are quick to emphasize how agility is all about comfort with change and learning to live in a constant state of fluctuation. However, even on the fastest most innovative teams, stability plays an important role. In fact, the confidence to shift gears or experiment with new ideas that could easily fail typically comes from a stable center of values and norms. Emotionally intelligent teams establish their values and norms up front (and constantly revisit them) in order to give

everyone a common ground for actions and decisions. This comes in especially handy under ongoing pressure when our emotions are more likely to hijack how we make decisions to act.

They insist on accountability. Agility doesn't mean "do what I say, except more of it and faster." It doesn't mean "exist in a state of anarchy" either. Agility means empowering individuals to make decisions and test ideas by stripping away hinderances to their work. The key is that it's a two way street. In return for freedom, those individuals are expected see their own work through, own up to mistakes, be proactive about changes to come, and communicate openly with their teammates and manager.

Bringing It All Together. Emotional intelligence at the team level is the glue that holds agile teams together. Without team EQ, even agile teams might succumb to high levels of stress, communication breakdowns, an environment where some people dominate and others are afraid to speak, and a lost sense of stability or direction. With team EQ, agility will be bolstered and thrive. Add these team EQ goals to your team's repertoire to better navigate turbulent times.

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3 Ways EQ Can Make Your Team More Agile



When thinking about team agility, it might help to picture a team of whitewater rafters heading toward class five rapids. The team paddles and maneuvers the raft swiftly but effectively. They're proactive in communicating logs or rocks they see in their path. They adapt in real time to new challenges by scanning the near horizon, gathering information, communicating, and calling out a clear strategy of action. They're decisive and intelligently improvisational in the face of stress and accelerated change. They have to be or they will capsize.

These agile traits make any team successful. In fact, [research](#) on agile teams shows greater productivity, increased employee satisfaction, and a stronger sense of trust and respect among the group. A Gallup [study](#) also found that employees who view their organizations as agile are more likely to believe in the future financial stability of their organization and more than twice as likely to believe in their leadership. So how does a team develop their agility? While there are essential elements of [process and structure](#), many of the core traits that define agile teams hinge on emotional intelligence (EQ) at the team level. For example, it's with team EQ that an agile team is able to develop an environment of trust, manage their stress through change, and communicate openly and clearly to devise a plan.

To aid in your team's agility, [TalentSmart](#) recommends focusing on six emotionally intelligent team behaviors that agile teams rely on to succeed. Here are the first three.

They build an environment of trust. This is first on the list for a reason. Agility means finding quick, effective solutions, making decisions in the moment, performing well under pressure, and taking calculated risks. None of this is possible without an environment of trust, because people need to feel safe first. In a year-long study of Google's teams, Google found that the single most important factor to their teams' success was not personality, IQ, or structure. It was a mentality called psychological safety. Psychological safety is a group mentality where people feel comfortable taking risks and don't fear rejection or ridicule. Google teams that felt this sense of safety had more equal contributions from all of their members, read their teammates' tones of voice and body language more effectively, and were more skilled at recognizing when a teammate felt excluded or upset. So how did the teams develop psychological safety? The answer was surprisingly simple and easy to implement: By setting aside time to share personal challenges or events with the group.

They communicate openly and fearlessly. Agile teams strip away barriers to innovation and improvement by empowering each member of their team to make decisions and test new ideas. With this great freedom of action, comes the great responsibility of communication. When significant changes are made, it's important that the rest of the team is cued in. Communicating your actions not only opens up potential for additional improvements or collaboration, but it also helps catch mistakes and prevent negative ripple effects.

They don't overvalue individuals. A [study](#) from MIT shows that a team's collective intelligence is actually much more likely to affect team performance than the sum of individual intelligences. And the good news is, collective intelligence is also much easier to improve. It's all about shifting the focus from individuals to the group dynamic and interactions (sounds a lot like EQ, doesn't it?). To improve collective intelligence, the researchers recommend you:

- Clarify the roles of individual members.
- Teach conflict resolution.
- Recognize and reward team accomplishments over individual ones.
- Don't reward how busy people are. Instead, reward team outcomes, team happiness, and team engagement

- Ensure equal participation.

Bringing It All Together. These three strategies all rely on emotional intelligence skills at the team level, and they can make or break your team's success. Stay tuned for TalentSmart's additional Team EQ strategies to help make your teams more agile.

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5 Things To Do As You Transition To Remote Work



With the coronavirus pandemic, you may have suddenly found yourself working from home bunkered up next to a copiously stocked fridge and a nervous roommate rattling off hourly news updates.

While increased snacking and a distracting roommate don't necessarily make for ideal working conditions, there's potential for much more serious problems to arise. After all, this is an unprecedented movement of workers from office to remote, and the movement essentially happened overnight.

Research shows that one of the gravest threats to remote employees is a feeling of isolation. In a joint [study](#) conducted at UT Austin, Yale, and NYU, researchers found that remote workers who felt isolated experienced a sharp decline in performance, felt a decreased sense of “belonging” to their organizations, and had an increased desire to leave their companies altogether.

The good news is that you can curb isolation and many of the other problems arising around remote work by paying extra attention to emotional intelligence (EQ). Establishing emotionally intelligent practices in your remote work can help bridge the gap between online work and in-office work.

Below are TalentSmart’s five essential strategies for communicating as effectively online as you do in person.

Meet by video. Ever been on a phone call where you share an idea you’ve been developing for a long time, and you’re met with a wave of silence in return? You inevitably run through the list of possible reactions as you wait to hear something back: Nods of approval, skeptical eye rolls, or furrowed brows... These types of miscommunications are inevitable on the phone because humans are by nature visual learners and communicators. In fact, [research](#) shows that our brains naturally pay more attention to visual cues than auditory ones during conversations. Even our memory sharpens in response to what we see rather than what we hear.

FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom play into our natural visual strengths. They also replicate in-person meetings more effectively than a conference call. On a conference call, people can mute themselves, get up and walk around, organize their desks, respond to emails, and flip through Instagram while other people talk. On a video call, people are accountable for their attention in the same ways they are at an around-the-table meeting. Video also allows emotions and reactions to surface in real time in front of the group.

Encourage breaks. When it comes to remote work, the default tends to be distrust. Managers seem to want to know about every minute of everyone’s day to make up for the fact that they can’t monitor butt-in-chair minutes like they could in the office. In reality, the default should be trust. Remote workers need breaks to walk, eat, use the bathroom, and socialize, just like they do in an office. Don’t make them feel guilty

for every minute spent standing up from their desks. Instead, monitor aspects of the big picture like the quantity and quality of work completed.

Cut out multitasking during meetings. One of the biggest killers of remote communication and productivity is social loafing during calls. You put ten people on a call, and people inevitably begin to feel like they don't need to be there. The result is usually muted phones, email checks, and snack breaks. In remote work, when meetings are your only form of communication, it's especially important to make them count. Here are four methods TalentSmart uses to keep remote meetings on track, involved, and communicative:

Call on people to share opinions. Calling on individuals keeps people mentally present during meetings because people are reassured that their opinions matter. No one wants to get caught off-guard in front of the group and waste everyone's time either.

Assign people tasks or roles. Instead of just letting the meeting play out passively with people contributing as they please, ask people to come in with questions, content, or research on a particular topic.

Address people individually. Carve out a time during weekly meetings (we like to use the first fifteen minutes) to conduct a round-robin meeting where people open up about what they're doing personally and professionally. If this is new to your team, try having the person leading the meeting share first to help set a comfortable precedent for everyone else.

Meet by video. Like we just emphasized in the previous section, video meetings elicit more responsibility and add an authentic personal touch.

Encourage conversations that stray off the beaten track. In an effort to understand what makes their best teams succeed, [Google closely analyzed](#) over a hundred of its teams for a year. The researchers looked for patterns in personality, IQ, and team structure, but none were discernible. Instead, they found a specific mentality that the best teams all shared: psychological safety. Psychological safety is a group mentality where people feel comfortable taking risks and don't fear rejection or ridicule. Google teams that felt this sense of safety had more equal contributions from all of their members, read their teammates' tones of voice and body language more effectively, and were more skilled at recognizing when a teammate felt excluded or upset. How did the teams develop psychological safety? The answer was simple: By opening up to each other about personal challenges or events in their lives.

So how do you recreate an environment of safety in a remote world stripped of water-cooler conversations and hallway run-ins? You have to make an active effort to strengthen bonding. It can be as simple as setting aside fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of a meeting to check in personally on each member of the team. You can also encourage people to hold their own virtual water-cooler conversations by meeting virtually for lunch or a snack.

You can't communicate enough. The tricky thing about remote work is trying to understand what the people around you are thinking and where they're coming from. When communication is minimized or confined to formal meetings, people inevitably miscommunicate and feel a growing sense of distrust and isolation. Nip this problem in the bud by erring on the side of over-communication. Sure, there are the usual things you would need to communicate about in an office, like the questions you have, documents you can't find, and clarity on some email instructions. But, there are also some forms of communication more unique to remote work, like updating bosses with progress on a project more frequently or taking a few minutes to converse casually the way you might in an office. If you manage people, set up times of open availability for anyone reporting to you. Try to schedule one-on-ones more often than usual. Also, be sure to communicate encouragement and emotional support, even if it feels unnecessary. Recognition goes a long way in fighting isolation by making people feel valued and connected to the organization.

Bringing It All Together

The secret to remote work is giving those extra nudges of effort to show people where you're coming from as well as trying to understand where they're coming from. These strategies all work to build a high-EQ remote workplace because they focus on using technology to make our interactions more human, not less. Maybe there's a silver lining to all the chaos and change going on right now: People are learning new ways to communicate and get work done, and this has the potential to make work more flexible moving forward.

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3 Powerful Ways To Stay Positive



We've all received the well-meaning advice to "stay positive." The greater the challenge, the more this glass-half-full wisdom can come across as Pollyannaish and unrealistic. It's hard to find the motivation to focus on the positive when positivity seems like nothing more than wishful thinking, especially during unsettling times like right now.

The real obstacle to positivity is that our brains are hard-wired to look for and focus on threats. This survival mechanism served humankind well back when we were hunters and gatherers, living each day with the very real threat of being killed by someone or something in our immediate surroundings.

That was eons ago. Today, this mechanism breeds pessimism and negativity through the mind's tendency to wander until it finds a threat. These "threats" magnify the perceived likelihood that things are going—and/or are going to go—poorly. When the threat is real and lurking in the bushes down the path, this mechanism serves you well. When the threat is imagined and you spend two months convinced the project you're working on is going to flop, this mechanism leaves you with a soured view of reality that wreaks havoc in your life.

Maintaining positivity is a daily challenge that requires focus and attention. You must be intentional about staying positive if you're going to overcome the brain's tendency to focus on threats. It won't happen by accident. That's why positivity is the skill that we should all be focusing on right now.

Positivity and Your Health

Pessimism is trouble because it's bad for your health. Numerous studies have shown that optimists are physically and psychologically healthier than pessimists.

Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania has conducted extensive research on the topic. Seligman worked with researchers from Dartmouth and the University of Michigan on a study that followed people from age 25 to 65 to see how their levels of pessimism or optimism influenced their overall health. The researchers found that pessimists' health deteriorated far more rapidly as they aged.

Seligman's findings are similar to research conducted by the Mayo Clinic that found optimists have lower levels of cardiovascular disease and longer life-spans. Although the exact mechanism through which pessimism affects health hasn't been identified, researchers at Yale and the University of Colorado found that pessimism is associated with a weakened immune response to tumors and infection.

Researchers from the University of Kentucky went so far as to inject optimists and pessimists with a virus to measure their immune response. The researchers found optimists had a much stronger immune response than pessimists.

Positivity and Performance

Keeping a positive attitude isn't just good for your health. Martin Seligman has also studied the connection between positivity and performance. In one study in particular, he measured the degree to which insurance salespeople were optimistic or pessimistic in their work. Optimistic salespeople sold 37% more policies than pessimists, who were twice as likely to leave the company during their first year of employment.

Seligman has studied positivity more than anyone, and he believes in the ability to turn pessimistic thoughts and tendencies around with simple effort and know-how. But Seligman doesn't just believe this. His research shows that people can transform a tendency toward pessimistic thinking into positive thinking through simple techniques that create lasting changes in behavior long after they are discovered.

Here are three things that you should be doing right now to stay positive.

1. Separate Fact from Fiction

The first step in learning to focus on the positive requires knowing how to stop negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that — thoughts, not facts.

When you find yourself believing the negative and pessimistic things your inner voice says, it's time to stop and write them down. Literally stop what you're doing and write down what you're thinking. Once you've taken a moment to slow down the negative momentum of your thoughts, you will be more rational and clear-headed in evaluating their veracity. Evaluate these statements to see if they're factual. You can bet the statements aren't true any time you see words like *never*, *always*, *worst*, *ever*, etc.

Do you really *always* lose your keys? Of course not. Perhaps you forget them frequently, but most days you do remember them. Are you *never* going to find a solution to your problem? If you really are that stuck, maybe you've been resisting asking for help. Or if it really is an intractable problem, then why are you wasting your time beating your head against the wall? If your statements still look like facts once they're on paper, take them to a friend or colleague you can trust, and see if he or she agrees with you. Then the truth will surely come out.

When it feels like something *always* or *never* happens, this is just your brain's natural threat tendency inflating the perceived frequency or severity of an event. Identifying and labeling your thoughts as *thoughts* by separating them from the facts will help you escape the cycle of negativity and move toward a positive new outlook.

2. Identify a Positive

Once you snap yourself out of self-defeating, negative thoughts, it's time to help your brain learn what you want it to focus on — the positive.

This will come naturally after some practice, but first you have to give your wandering brain a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about. Any positive thought will do to refocus your brain's attention. When things are going well, and your mood is good, this is relatively easy. When things are going poorly, and your mind is flooded with negative thoughts, this can be a challenge. In these moments, think about your day and identify one positive thing that happened, no matter how small. If you can't think of something from the current day, reflect on the previous day or even the previous week. Or perhaps there is an exciting event you are looking forward to that you can focus your attention on.

The point here is you must have something positive that you're ready to shift your attention to when your thoughts turn negative. Step one stripped the power from negative thoughts by separating fact from fiction. Step two is to replace the negative with a positive. Once you have identified a positive thought, draw your attention to that thought each time you find yourself dwelling on the negative. If that proves difficult, you can repeat the process of writing down the negative thoughts to discredit their validity, and then allow yourself to freely enjoy positive thoughts.

3. Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude

Taking time to contemplate what you're grateful for isn't merely the "right" thing to do; it reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23%. Research conducted at the University of California, Davis, found that people who worked daily to cultivate an attitude of gratitude experienced improved mood, energy and substantially less anxiety due to lower cortisol levels.

You cultivate an attitude of gratitude by taking time out every day to focus on the positive. Any time you experience negative or pessimistic thoughts, use this as a cue to shift gears and think about something positive. In time, a positive attitude will become a way of life.

Bringing It All Together

These steps sound incredibly basic, but they have tremendous power because they retrain your brain to have a positive focus. These steps break old habits, if you force yourself to use them. Given the mind's natural tendency to wander toward negative thoughts, we can all use a little help with staying positive. Put these steps to use, and you'll reap the physical, mental, and performance benefits that come with a positive frame of mind. It will also help you remain focused and productive, especially when times are tough.

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