

When Technical Skills are Not Enough: The Role of Interpersonal Relationships in Leadership Success

Debra Cannarella, High Performing Systems, Inc.



Debra Cannarella
Director of Operations



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High
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706-769-5836 • www.hpsys.com

A technical manager felt like his career advancement had stalled, and he came to High Performing Systems, Inc. (HPS), for coaching. He had applied for a promotion and was turned down twice. When he asked a trusted mentor for suggestions, his mentor advised, “At the higher organizational levels, your technical skills will only get you so far. If you want to continue to move up, you need to consider the value of relationship building and polishing your people skills—Emotional Intelligence.”

Interpersonal Relationships and Emotional Intelligence

In the context of the EQ-i and Emotional Intelligence (EI), interpersonal skills are critical. EI is a “person’s ability to perceive and manage his/her own emotions in a manner that results in successful interactions with the environment,” according to [Dr. Dick Thompson](#), President and CEO of HPS, Inc. The second part of the definition of EI is where interpersonal relationships come in: “and if others are present, to also perceive and manage their emotions in a manner that results in successful interpersonal interactions.” The ability to build and maintain successful interactions with other people is what interpersonal relationships are all about. At the executive role levels, networking and collaboration are critical to leadership success. Our client learned that if he wanted to be more successful, he had to work with and through others.

Connecting with Others Counts

After the HPS coach talked with him, the manager acknowledged that networking and relationship building were not strengths of his. He wanted

to learn techniques for establishing and maintaining relationships. The first step was that his manager wanted him to be more visible in his industry. Our client was a member of various industry-related professional organizations and networking groups. From a coaching perspective his task was clear cut: go to meetings, participate. He had to get to know key players and make himself known in his industry. Networking was a way for him to build relationships and practice interpersonal skills outside his company.

Networking also allowed our client to hone his basic interpersonal skills. By increasing his interactions with others, he was able to practice communication skills and conflict resolution techniques. He became a better listener, practiced negotiation techniques and applied conflict resolution strategies. When his peers began to see his improved interpersonal skills, they were more receptive to working with him. His enhanced EI helped him land the promotion the next time he applied.

In many organizations, technical skills will help a leader be successful to a certain point. As leaders move up to higher role levels, they often discover that IQ and technical ability will only take them so far. Building and maintaining relationships with others will have a significant impact on success at senior manager and executive role levels.

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