



F O C U S

Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC

“People Skills” Are More Important Than IQ

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Psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman, PhD, achieved widespread recognition in 1995 with his groundbreaking book [*Emotional Intelligence*](#), which showed how success in life and work is based on much more than IQ. In his most recent book, [*Social Intelligence*](#), Goleman explains that human beings are wired to connect with one another. When we meet other people face-to-face, our brains search for subtle clues in their facial expressions to deduce what they are feeling—then our minds adjust our own feelings to match. The better you are at this, the more in sync you will be with those around you, increasing your chances of **success** in personal relationships and the workplace. **What is “social intelligence?”** Social intelligence refers to interpersonal skills. It’s our empathic ability to understand what other people are thinking and to feel what other people are feeling. It also is having the willingness and ability to know what to do with this information in order to create smooth interactions with other people and achieve our goals. **Are these social-interaction skills something we’re born with or something we can develop?** Both. About 15% of children are born with a tendency to shyness, but these children will not end up as shy adults if they are encouraged to be more outgoing while they are still young. We are not prisoners of our genetics where social

intelligence is concerned. The social wiring in our brains is not even fully formed until our mid-20’s and experiments have shown that we can continue to develop our social intelligence throughout our lives. **What’s the best way to learn to relate to other people?** One way is to become a better listener. Do you really hear what people are saying when they talk to you, or do you leap to conclusions about what they mean based on what you are thinking? It takes a concerted effort to become a better listener, but it can be done. *Pay close attention to good listeners* you know when they are engaged in conversations. Think back to these skilled listeners during your own conversations. *Make a contract with yourself* to never respond until you are certain you understand what has been said. If you’re not sure what the other person means, restate what he/she said and ask if that is what he/she meant. *Use every conversation as an opportunity* to develop your listening skills, even exchanges that are not particularly important to you. **Humans do not only identify emotions in others, they actually adopt their emotions as if they were their own.** Neurologists have discovered that our brains contain “mirror neurons” that activate the emotions we sense in the brains of those around us. This often occurs without us even realizing it is happening. To a lesser extent, we even pick up

emotions from actors on television or in the movies. This ability to absorb the emotions of those around us makes it easier for us to work and live together



harmoniously in groups, but it also means that we can catch other people’s emotions as easily as we catch their colds. You might be having a great day, but if you interact with people who are fearful or angry, you could become fearful or angry yourself without knowing why. You could also walk away suddenly happy from a brief encounter with someone who is upbeat. **If we are so susceptible to the emotions of others, is it damaging to spend time with negative people?** If there is someone in your life who is “emotionally toxic,” you might want to spend less time with him/her for your own good. If you cannot get the toxic people out of your life—or you have a job that regularly exposes you to negative emotions, such as emergency room nurse or police officer—you must safeguard yourself against negative emotions and learn to be more emotionally resilient. Staying

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We all make an impact on the lives around us— which means we all have the ability to change the world.

Nate St. Pierre, Founder of Love Drop



“People Skills” Are More Important Than IQ (continued)

positive may even have a positive effect on toxic people. **Is there a way to convey criticism that doesn't cause bad feelings?** The emotional content of our messages can be important. Studies have shown that two leaders can deliver exactly the same message with completely different results. An upbeat message will result in better performance while a downbeat message has the opposite effect. A boss can criticize an employee and have that employee walk away feeling good, but only if the boss truly feels positive and supportive when he offers the criticism. If the boss feels anger or exasperation, the employee is more likely to become angry and depressed. When you want to let someone down easy, convey

positive emotions and bracket your “no” between two upbeat statements. You can say something like, “It really is great working with you. You always bring me quality ideas. I’m going to have to say no this time—I just don’t have room in the budget. Keep up the good work, and we’ll talk again in a few months.” **Do men and women differ when it comes to social intelligence?** There are some statistically significant differences. In general, women tend to be more emotionally empathic than men—that is, better able to pick up the emotions of others. Women tend to be more socially skilled—better able to do the right thing to keep a relationship running smoothly. Men tend to be better at returning

to normal after experiencing distressing emotions. Men also tend to have more self-confidence in social situations.

Source: **Bottom Line/Personal** interviewed Daniel Goleman, PhD, co-chairman of The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University, Piscataway, New Jersey, and author of *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (Bantam). He also produced *Wired to Connect*, a downloadable conversation series with experts in the field of social intelligence. www.danielgoleman.info.

Meditation for People Who Don't Like to Meditate

We have all heard the benefits of meditating. For decades, studies have shown that meditation helps with depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia, pain, high blood pressure, self-esteem, self-control, concentration and creativity. Yet for many people, meditation seems daunting. Maybe you find it hard to sit still, to clear your mind, to make the time, or to stick with it long enough to experience the effects. **Key to success:** Choose a technique that suits your personality, schedule and level of experience, then do it consistently. Twenty minutes or more daily is a good goal, but even five minutes is helpful if you do it every day—and some techniques take almost no time at all. **If you are a beginner:** The methods below are effective yet simple enough for a novice. Start with just a few minutes, and work your way up.

- **Single-tasking.** A time-crunched society encourages multitasking—so you sort mail while on the phone and listen to audio books while driving. *What you may not know:* The simple act of focusing fully on a single task is a meditative exercise. It improves your powers of concentration, alleviates stress and boosts mood by enhancing your appreciation of the here-and-now. *Try:* Once or twice each day, give your complete attention to just one activity. *Example:* When you fold the laundry, don't turn on the TV—just enjoy the softness of the fabrics and the soothing rhythm of your

hand motions.

- **Focused breathing.** Sit in a quiet place, on the floor or in a chair, keeping your back straight so your lungs can expand. Pay attention to your breathing. Feel the air moving through your nostrils as you slowly inhale and exhale feel your abdomen rise and fall. Then choose either of these sites (nostrils or abdomen) and focus fully on the sensations there. Soon you may notice that your mind has wandered. Don't berate yourself—this happens even to experienced meditators. Simply return your attention to the breath.
- **Centering prayer.** Choose a phrase or a word that is spiritually meaningful for you, such as *God is love* or *shalom*. With each breath, repeat it silently to yourself. Again, if your thoughts start to stray just calmly return to your prayer.

If you hate to sit still: Some people can't stop squirming when they try to meditate. *Solution:* Moving meditation.

- **Qigong, tai chi or yoga.** These practices combine specific movements with a contemplative focus on the body, so you exercise while you meditate. Many health clubs, adult-education centers and hospitals offer classes in these techniques.

- **Mindful eating.** Eat a meal alone, in silence, savoring the experience. When you first sit



down, spend a moment enjoying the colors and aromas of the food. Take a bite and chew slowly. How does the taste and texture change as you chew? What sensations do you perceive as you swallow? *Surprise:* You are meditating. Continue to eat each bite as consciously as you can, never rushing.

If you can't find the time: Some days you may not have even five minutes to meditate—but you can take just a moment.

- **Take three breaths.** Whenever you feel tense, take three long, deep breaths. Even a few conscious inhalations and exhalations will calm you. Also use cues in your environment as regular reminders to focus and breathe deeply. *Example:* Take three slow breaths every time you hang up the phone, walk through a doorway, or get into a car.
- **Beauty in the moment.** Three times a day, look around you and notice something lovely—the scent of someone's perfume, the happy sound of children





Meditation (continued)

playing. Explore the experience with your full attention. *Example:* A light breeze is blowing. Watch the graceful way it makes the grass sway...listen to it whisper as it moves through the trees...feel its gentle touch on your cheeks. Notice your emotions of pleasure and appreciation and carry them with you as you continue through your day.

If you already love to meditate: If you are an accomplished meditator and want to enrich your experience, try these more advanced techniques:

- **Contemplative reading.** Select a brief passage—two or three sentences—from a philosophy book, religious text or other writing that is meaningful to you. Read it slowly and reflectively, over and over. If your reading brings up insights, pon-

der them. If your mind drifts to unrelated thoughts, return to reading.

- **Inquiry.** Sit and focus on your breathing. When a thought, feeling, sound or other sensation enters your awareness, instead of turning your attention back to the breath, explore the experience. Does it seem to have a shape or image associated with it? Does it change or fade away as you examine it? *Examples:* **You notice a tickle on your shoulder.** As you study it, you note that it feels diffuse, then localizes in one spot, then moves to different area and prickles, then disappears. **You are feeling anxious.** Rather than trying to figure out what is causing this, note where the anxiety manifests in your body (i.e. a fluttery stomach, a tight muscle) also notice any images and

thoughts associated with it and how those images and thoughts change as you observe them. When a particular sensation passes, return your attention to your breath until the next sensation enters your awareness and acceptance.

Source: Roger Walsh, MD, PhD, professor of psychiatry and human behavior in the School of Medicine, and of anthropology and philosophy in the School of Humanities, both at University of California, Irvine. He has done extensive research on Asian philosophies, religion and the effects of meditation and has received more than 20 national and international awards. He is author of [*Essential Spirituality: The 7 Central Practices to Awaken Heart and Mind*](#) (Wiley), which contains a forward by the Dalai Lama.

“You’re Going to Worry Yourself to Death!”

Perhaps not. Adults who display persistence, focus on details, pinch their pennies, and are responsible may just live the longest. In 1921, Lewis Terman, a Stanford University psychologist conducted a study in an effort to discover the sources of intellectual leadership. His subjects included 1500 children from San Francisco area schools. These subjects lives were then followed for 80 years to understand why some of them thrived and why some did not. Health scientists have spent the last 20 years tracking each of the 1500 participants to see how long each of them lived and how they died. Scientists also examined factors such as schools attended, jobs held, and personality types to see which predicted longevity. Terman’s study clearly revealed that the best predictor of longevity in children is conscientiousness—being prudent, well organized, and even somewhat obsessive. The same was true later in life. Being dependable doesn’t mean being dull. Many of Terman’s most conscientious subjects led very exciting lives. Perhaps one of the most apparent explanations is that conscientious individuals do more to ensure their health. For example, keeping routine doctors appointments, wearing seatbelts, and engage in less risky behaviors, such as smoking, excessive drinking,

drug abuse, or driving fast. It’s not that they are entirely opposed to taking risks, rather, they seem to have a reasonable idea as to how far to push the envelope. Subsequently, this trait seems to lead to happier marriages, healthier friendships, and more productive work situations. So it seems that conscientious people create healthier lives overall by using a reasonable amount of concern. Conscientiousness is, as a rule, a positive strength. However, as with any strength, if it is over-used, it can become a weakness. When conscientiousness becomes unreasonable, it becomes anxiety. And the influence of chronic anxiety can negatively affect one’s health. The good news is that conscientiousness can be learned and anxiety can be tempered. It is never too late to adapt a healthier style of coping.

Source: [*The Longevity Project*](#) by Howard S. Friedman, Ph.D., and Leslie R. Martin, Ph.D.



The best predictor of longevity is conscientiousness.





Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC
1201 South Main Street
Suite 100
North Canton, Ohio 44720
Phone: 330.244.8782
Fax: 330.244.8795
Email: info@vistapcc.com



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Caught in the Middle of a Family Feud

Quarreling relatives may try to drag you into the fray. But getting entangled adds to stress and may strain the family further. Instead...

Don't become a mouthpiece. Suppose mom is angry with your brother, but she's afraid to confront him, so she complains to you. You carry messages back and forth, yet the people directly involved never talk honestly together. When negotiations fail, combatants blame you. *Solution:* Say, "I can't play peacemaker. Please resolve this by talking openly to each other."

Redirect the conversation. When a squabble complains, refocus on the steps to resolution—communication, compromise, and forgiveness.

Refuse to take sides. Simply state, "I love you both. It upsets me that you're not getting along."

Keep your complaints out of the mix. Adding your own accusations—"You're mad at sis for not lending you money? I'm mad at her, too, for forgetting my birthday"—only compounds the current conflict.

Suggest outside help. If feuders can't reconcile, urge them to see a therapist, clergy member or lawyer. However, don't find a mediator for them—it only deepens your involvement.

Exceptions: A crisis does warrant stepping in. *Examples:* When there is abuse, a crime, significant emotional harm to a child, addiction, or any suspicion of suicidal thoughts.

Source: Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, sex therapist, radio advice host, and TV personality. She is a member of the adjunct faculty of Columbia University Teachers College in New York City.

