

EQ CONNECTIONS

An Emotional Intelligence Newsletter by E.I. Assessments



“A PROBLEM IS A CHANCE FOR YOU TO DO YOUR BEST.”

– Duke Ellington

PROBLEM SOLVING:

Mind of an Engineer

**Written by
John J. Hughes**

Have you ever become so focused on the emotional aspects of an issue that you actually experience a high level of anxiety? Have other people ever explained important emotional information about a problem that you completely missed? Are you often overwhelmed with the responsibilities of making lots of decisions every day? Do strong emotions easily distract you? If you answered YES to these questions then you may need to work on developing your *Problem Solving* skills.

Clients I have worked with who scored high in *Problem Solving* include engineers, architects, military personnel, nurses, financial professionals and construction managers since they have all been trained in methodologies to identify, assess, analyze and resolve issues. Each of these

professions, and many others, rely on a combination of standard operating procedures plus an ability to be flexible, which is another EQ-i skill.

Arriving at a solution to a problem is different from implementing it. People who score high in *Problem Solving* will know the best type of decision-making style to use in order to successfully implement a resolution. They are often very effective at generating a wide range of solution options.

WHAT IS THE SKILL OF PROBLEM SOLVING?

This skill reflects your ability to apply a step-by-step process for identifying, evaluating and resolving issues related to emotions.

WHAT DOES PROBLEM SOLVING LOOK LIKE?

People who score high in *Problem Solving* on the EQ-i 2.0:

- Have a very confident attitude in the methodical way that they approach dealing with new issues and problems
- Apply a conscious or unconscious process to gather and analyze information and data that will be used to define the problem
- Understand how to evaluate and implement a solution in order to ensure that the problem has been solved



PROBLEM SOLVING & EMPATHY

I believe that it is almost impossible to make an effective business decision without consideration of how it will impact people, either positively or negatively. Those people include your peers, employees, customers, suppliers and competitors.

Businesses need processes that drive decisions which are both timely and successful. This requires the discipline of having a process-oriented mind, like an engineer, while at the same time being open to emotional information. Maximizing your emotional intelligence is about creating a balance between *Problem Solving* and *Empathy*. If a person does not have this balance, then he or she may lean toward being too process focused or too absorbed with feeling.

In reviewing **1,356** EQ-i reports completed by a wide range of professionals (**722** women and **634** men), I was curious to see how many had this balance of *Problem Solving* with *Empathy*. In previous EQ-i skills comparisons, the results were not very notable. However, in this case, there does appear to be some differences in EQ-i results based on gender.



First, **32%** of this group (**214** women and **215** men), have a process or methodology which they rely on for solving problems. Their process includes and involves them being open and sensitive to emotional data. People learn their problem solving methodology in different ways. Some individuals are professionally trained while others develop their process or approach by

listening and learning from their parents or other family members.

Of this group of **1,356** professionals, **15%**, or **208** women, have a strong preference for initiating and following a set methodology to solve a problem. It may not be a surprise that **20%**, or **279** men, in this group also had a preference for employing an established problem solving process. When *Problem Solving* is very high and *Empathy* is low, a person

might become so focused on an immediate issue that he or she overlooks or disregards very important emotional information. Many times, this additional emotional data can be beneficial in finding the best solution.

For the remainder of this group of **1,356** professionals, **31%**, have a tendency to begin their problem solving process with a strong connection, almost attraction, to the emotional components or elements of an issue. It is interesting that **300** women, or **22%** of this group have that high level of *Empathy* compared with **140** men, or **11%**. While emotional information is important, too much focus on feelings can become a distraction to finding a workable solution.

I guess the bottom line is, a mix of genders will always contribute to finding the best solutions.

PROBLEM SOLVING & ENVIRONMENT

A few years ago, I sat next to U.S. Army Captain John Smith who was flying from Atlanta to attend a leadership meeting at West Point. CPT Smith (which is not his real name) was assigned to General Peter W. Chiarelli's staff which was located at the academy. I had been working with the Braves front office so we got to talking about leadership and emotional intelligence during our flight back to New York. We connected and over a four-year period, he took the EQ-i three times. The first time was not long after we first met. The second was during his deployment in Bagram, Afghanistan for 18 months and the third time was after he left the service and joined a consulting firm.

Reviewing his three reports, it was striking how his *Problem Solving* score actually increased almost 20 points when he left his West Point assignment and took field command. He was suddenly in an environment in which he relied on both military SOPs and immediate flexibility. When I spoke with him about the increase in his score, he credited his problem solving capability to the change in the environments. In referencing West Point, he said, "Sir, when you are a captain surrounded by generals, no one really wants to hear your opinion. However, when I'm in the field, in a hostile environment, making decisions that affect my people, it's a whole different feeling." It is also interesting to note that his *Optimism* score was also 20 points higher during his deployment.

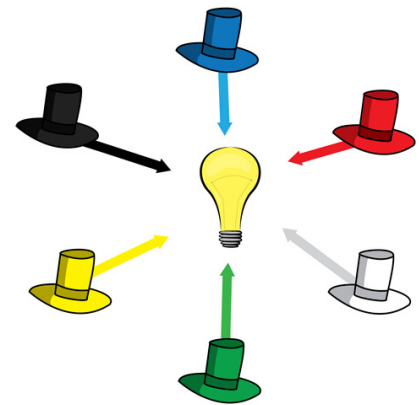
“DON'T FIND FAULT. FIND A REMEDY”

– Henry Ford

DEVELOPING A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

Do you have an established approach or methodology at work for dealing with setbacks? Do you avoid brainstorming or problem solving meetings because people become too emotional? Are some people so detached they only talk about facts and process?

If you have trouble finding solutions at work, I strongly recommend reading, *The Six Thinking Hats* written by the father of lateral thinking, Edward DeBono.



Though it predates the concept of Emotional Intelligence, *The Six Thinking Hats* will offer you a straightforward process almost guaranteed to keep a group of people properly focused to uncover the best solutions and ideas. Having used the process to address some difficult problem situations at the New York Times, I believe the brilliance of DeBono's approach is its simplicity in applying the process.

DeBono believes that if you can align and focus people's thinking at the same time then the results can be very powerful. To create that alignment, he uses the metaphor of hats.

Here is a quick summary of *The Six Thinking Hats*:

White Hat – List data and information. What do we know about the issue?

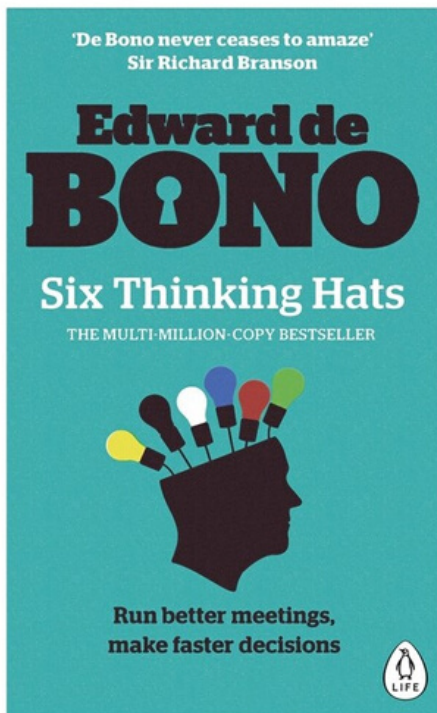
Red Hat – Think about emotions. What do we feel about this issue?

Green Hat – Think creatively. What ideas do you have?

Yellow Hat – Think positively. What are the benefits of an idea?

Black Hat – Think critically. What are the pitfalls?

Blue Hat – Think about the process. What hats should we use?



When you wear a specific hat, you are asked to think a certain way. For example, white hat thinking is about facts and data while green hat thinking is about generating creative ideas. I believe that red hat thinking, which is all about expressing your emotions related to the problem, is very important. This hat allows emotions to be tapped into and feelings to be acknowledged.

Solving problems involves emotion and people are entitled to their feelings; however, in business environments, miscommunicated feelings can hijack or shut down a meeting. With a little practice, you will find the Six Thinking Hats process to be very effective at focusing the creative energy of the group.

NEXT ISSUE:

Issue # 12 Reality Testing: Just the Facts