

Is “The Pilot Personality” An Oxymoron?

I’m sure many of us know some flight attendants who would probably agree that “pilot personality” is an oxymoron!

But all is not lost. In an attempt to show the other side of the coin the following list of typical pilot traits were compiled from a 2007 ALPA (Airline Pilots Association) study that I shortened up.



These traits might be why we’re not often thought of as “social butterflies!” But we do have some redeeming qualities and the good news is we’re very good at what we do.

In the 2007 ALPA magazine study, the editors found the traits that many of us have are...

“We avoid introspection and have difficulty revealing, expressing, or even recognizing our feelings. When we do experience unwanted feelings, we tend to mask them, sometimes with humor or even anger.

“Being unemotional helps us deal with crises, but can make us insensitive toward the feelings of others.

“Our spouses and children frequently complain that we have difficulty expressing complex human emotions toward them. We’re inclined to modify our environment rather than our behavior.

This emotional "block" can create difficulty communicating. How many incidents or accidents have occurred due to poor communication? The vast majority of Professional Standards cases are caused by poor communication.

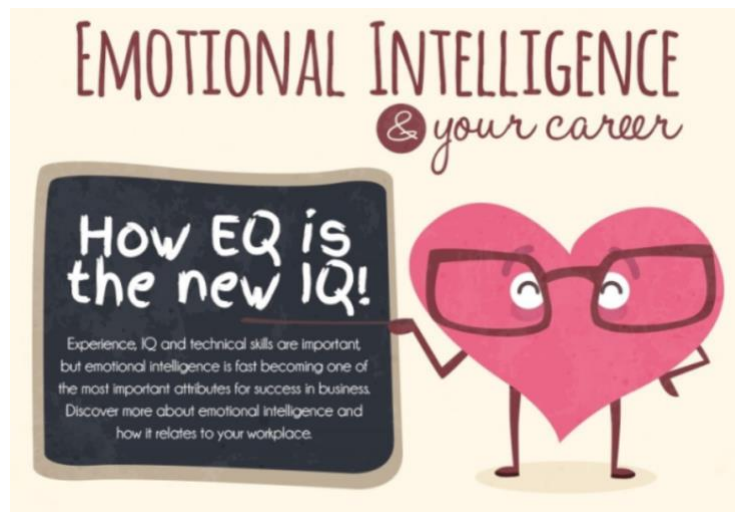
Our tendency toward suspicious/paranoid behavior also affects the way we function in our private lives. We’re concrete, practical, linear thinkers rather than abstract,

philosophical, or theoretical. We're bimodal: (not bipolar!) on/off, black/white, good/bad, safe/unsafe, regulations/non-regulations."

With these kinds of traits, unfortunately we don't rank high on the Emotional Intelligence (EQ) scale!

But as mentioned above, these traits make us very good at what we do, keeping ourselves and our passengers safe as we transport them to their destinations.

Airline and corporate pilot hiring departments actively look for these personality traits, and more, in the pilots they hire. But these traits are often the same things that make us, to put it mildly, "a little rough around the edges!"



What is Emotional Intelligence or EQ?

The term was made popular by Daniel Goleman in his 1996 book of the same name.

He defines Emotional Intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand and manage our own emotions as well as recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others.

In practical terms, this means being aware that emotions can drive our behavior and impact people (positively and negatively). It also implies that we need to learn how to manage those emotions – both our own and others – especially when we are under pressure.

We all know people who are in full control of their emotions. They're calm in a crisis, and they make good decisions, however stressful the situation. I think we would all agree that Captain Sully in *The Miracle on The Hudson* is someone who fits that description.

Some people can even read the emotions of others. They understand what to say to make people feel better, and they know how to inspire them to take action.

People like this have a high EQ. They have solid relationships, they're personable and they're likely to be resilient in the face of adversity.

This kind of high EQ is something that most of us aren't inherently long on. Given our potential EQ shortcomings, it's important to take this into account before we act.

What's Your Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ)?

Is your IQ in the genius category, above 140 but your EQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient) is below 100 and descending?

Most of us are intelligent, some highly so, with corresponding high IQ's (Intelligence Quotients), or else management wouldn't turn us loose with some very important lives and very expensive equipment.

Regarding the reference to the Professional Standards cases in the ALPA study above that stem from the lack of proper communication, I was the ALPA/TWA Pro Standards Committee Chairman during my time at both TWA and also at NetJets. I've seen my share of pilot personalities acting out, with some potentially dangerous consequences, especially during the contentious merger of TWA and Ozark, back in 1986.

The Connection Between Pilot EQ and Good Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is an aviation buzz word that has been around for a long time. Situational awareness is knowing what's going on around us, taking it all in, processing it and coming up with a judgment of whether what we see, feel and experience is good or bad, dangerous or safe, threatening, friendly or not, approachable or should I stay away.

Some pilots are better disposed to good situational awareness than others. Here's an example of a fighter pilots challenge to use good EQ.

A Fighter Pilot's Challenge in Staying Safe While Using Good Pilot EQ

One of the pilots I met and interviewed at Oshkosh for an article was Dr. John Marselus. John is a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy with over 3,000 hours in the A-10 Thunderbolt and F-15E Strike Eagle along with commanding at several different levels in the USAF.

In his own words, "One thing I found out was that the way I acted when strapping on \$50M worth of a sleek hound of death fighter aircraft and how I relate to others in more normal

circumstances had to reckon with. As a fighter pilot, we're taught to make split second decisions with precision and accuracy since it's really the most disciplined flying in the world.

I discovered that those fast reactions with short concise communications do not work well in meetings or when listening to people. I still catch myself analyzing someone's idea before completely listening to them. Your article on emotional IQ is good and perhaps my example might help others avoid learning the hard way."

The Personal Touch

Here are 10 very simple tips that will help increase your Pilot EQ. I've practiced these for years and have found them helpful. They might help to increase your EQ score and make your life and flying career more enjoyable.

1. "Reach out and touch someone." It's been proven that a simple, often apparently unnoticed touch when you're talking to someone, "bonds" you in some small but important way. Obviously, in today's paranoid culture, be aware when that's appropriate or not.
2. Introduce yourself to others first rather than waiting for them to do so. This also gives you the advantage of getting their first name.
3. Then...REMEMBER THEIR NAME!
4. And USE first names. This is an oft overlooked, yet powerful way to convey to another person that you care about them. As you go about your day, observe how few people use first names in conversation. Also notice how those people who do use another's first name seem to get better responses.
5. Compliment others when you recognize a job well done or see someone who goes out of their way to help in a situation.
6. Recognizing and complimenting someone's efforts is a great way to cultivate a "servant's" heart. Look for ways to help others without a reason to do so. It's the old, "Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty."
7. Concentrate on asking other people how they're doing. And then.....wait for their answer and listen with passion! Too often we're rehearsing our own agenda in our head and could care less about their response. Lowers your EQ drastically!
8. Listen more. It's amazing how great a conversationalist people think you are when you just listen to them.

9. Let go of having to be perfect. That doesn't mean not being accurate. Perfectionism is different than accuracy.

10. Focus on the positive in situations, people and events.

This is obviously not a complete list of EQ qualities. Come up with your own. Sometimes the best way to do this is to examine your own life and the areas where you rank low in EQ and just do the opposite! That would be a good place to start.

Here's an EQ quiz that you can take if you feel your EQ could need a makeover:

<http://www.ihhp.com/free-eq-quiz>.

This test just might help you see if you're good relationship material, if you're going to have a fun, productive, happy flying career, or if you need to upgrade your ranking on the flight attendants list of favorite pilots!

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