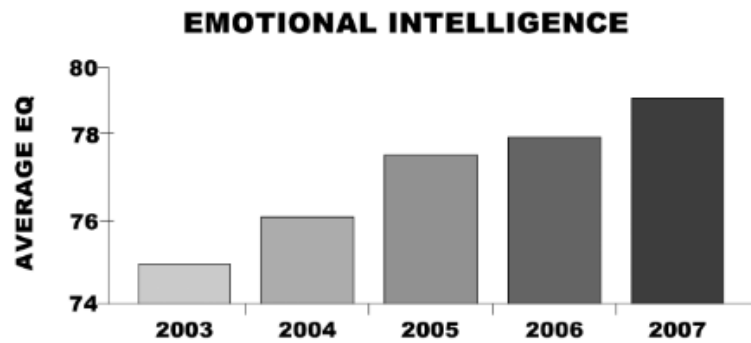


### Collective EQ: A Case Study (2008)

At the end of 2008, we took a good look at how the collective EQ of the U.S. population had changed since 2003. While we weren't surprised to see those we tested and taught improve their EQ, we were intrigued to watch the EQ scores of newbies increase with each passing year. And the increase continued, year after year after year—the EQ scores of those we'd never tested or taught made a slow and steady climb. We discovered a substantial increase in the emotional intelligence of the U.S. workforce between 2003 and 2007. Skeptics might be tempted to look at the graph and think, *What's the big deal? That's just a four-point increase in five years!*

But think of the impact a seemingly small temperature increase say one or two degrees has upon our ecosystem. The same is true with human behavior in the workplace, where the frozen poles of low emotional intelligence were starting to melt.



Once we took a closer look at the specific changes the broad gains in EQ had created, the real power of the transformation came to light. Between 2003 and 2008, we saw the percentage of people who were highly attuned to their own emotions and to the emotions of other people rise from 13.7% to 18.3%. During that same period, the percentage of people with a poor understanding of how anxiety, frustration, and anger influence their behavior had dropped from 31.0% to 14.0%. When you apply these proportions to the then 180 million people in America's workforce, it meant that 9 million more people than in 2003 almost always keep their cool during heated conflicts; 9 million more people actually showed that they cared about their co-workers and customers when they suffered hard times; and 25 million fewer people were painfully oblivious to the impact their behavior had on others.

What makes this discovery so special is that prior to taking the test, very few, if any, of the people in our sample had ever received formal emotional intelligence training. Yet their average EQ scores steadily increased from year to year. It's as if the people who intentionally practiced emotionally intelligent behaviors were infecting others who may have never even heard of the concept.

YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH HIGH EQ SKILLS	PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH LOW EQ SKILLS
2003	13.7	31.0
2004	14.7	19.0
2005	14.8	18.5
2006	15.1	17.1
2007	18.3	14.0

YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH HIGH EQ SKILLS	PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH LOW EQ SKILLS
2003	13.7	31.0
2004	14.7	19.0
2005	14.8	18.5
2006	15.1	17.1
2007	18.3	14.0
2008	16.7	13.8

Emotional intelligence skills much like emotions themselves are contagious. That means that our EQ skills are highly dependent on the surrounding people and circumstances. The more we interact with empathetic people, the more empathetic we become. The more time we spend with other people who openly discuss emotions, the more skilled we become at identifying and understanding emotions. That is precisely what makes emotional intelligence a learned skill, rather than some unalterable trait bestowed only upon a lucky few at

birth.

But that's where the good times end. In 2008—for the first time since we began tracking it—collective emotional intelligence dropped, underscoring just how susceptible to change these skills truly are.

Federal economists pinpointed December 2007 as the start of the United States' worst economy in 70 years, which meant that 2008 did not see a single day without recession. The relapse in emotional intelligence skills between 2007 and 2008 is the product of economic woes. Hard times of any kind—financial, familial, or job-related—create more intense and often prolonged negative emotions that ultimately result in stress. In addition to the physical costs of stress, such as weight gain and heart disease, stress also taxes our mental resources. Under stress-free conditions, we can consciously devote extra effort to staying calm and collected during the trials and tribulations of everyday life. We are more confident in our abilities to handle unexpected events, and we allow our minds to overcome troublesome matters. Unmanaged stress, however, consumes much of those mental resources. It reduces our minds to something like a state of martial law in which emotions single-handedly dictate behavior, while our rational capacities are busy trying to turn lemons into lemonade. Suddenly, a little setback in your project at work that would have been no big deal in relatively prosperous times feels more like a catastrophe than a minor nuisance. For many people, their EQ skills desert them at precisely the time when they need these skills the most—under stress. Only those with well-trained and almost second-nature EQ skills can effectively weather the storm.

This stress seems to be having a significant impact on our collective emotional intelligence. We went from 18.3% of people being highly skilled in emotional intelligence in 2007 to only 16.7% in 2008. In other words, we lost 2.8 million highly skilled soldiers in the the battle for a more emotionally intelligent society.

That is 2.8 million people who could have been guideposts showing others the way to more emotionally intelligent behaviors but were instead struggling to keep their own skills sharp.

