



*You, your colleagues, and direct reports may be smarter than you think. The question is: What kind of smart?*

*Maile Topliff uncovers the various intelligences that, when developed, can raise your leadership game to a whole new level.*

# How Are You Smart?

*by* **MAILE TOPLIFF**

## Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.

~ Walter Lippmann

### How are you smart?

Your first response to that question might have been about your IQ - Intelligence Quotient. Especially if you grew up in the United States, you were likely socialized to believe that IQ tests are the best way to measure how smart someone is. IQ tests typically focus on aspects of being good with numbers or words. IQ isn't a predictor of what someone will achieve with his/her life. I, like many, believe that there are more ways than IQ to be smart and that it is beneficial to take a broader view. We all have access to aspects of different types of intelligences and wide ranges of abilities.

As a leader, there are three reasons that you may want to explore multiple intelligences:

1. It's important to be aware that you have the capacity to grow and stretch your own intelligences. You can build your ability and strength in your brain processing. How do you challenge yourself to take a fresh look and not default to the status quo? How might you approach problem solving in a different way?

2. In leading others, it's meaningful to pay attention to how your people are smart. How do they approach problem solving? Take a fresh look at the direct report that might be an outlier. Help your people recognize their intelligence strengths.

3. As you develop your knowledge, and your practice in multiple intelligences, especially emotional and social intelligence, it is likely that you will continue to increase your influence and ability to work more effectively across the organization.

All of these can add up to a potentially positive impact on business results and the bottom line.

At a high level, here is the context in which the theory of multiple intelligences came to be. Over the past thirty-plus years, there has been a huge increase in research and knowledge about our brains and how they function. A lot of that can be tied to the advent of neuroimaging and the ability to see what parts of the brain are activated by different actions or thoughts. We still have much to learn about the brain and how it operates. It used to be a commonly held belief that our brains were a fairly static organ throughout our adult lives. Research has established that our brains have great plasticity and respond to changes in our own behavior, thinking and emotions, as well as changes in our external environment including physical injury.

In 1983, Howard Gardner published the book *Frames of the Mind* and introduced his theory of multiple intelligences. His theory and perspective continues to spark discussion about intelligence(s), ability,

skills, and what we know about the brain. It is important to point out that his theory includes the premise that we all have aspects of these intelligences and that each person has their own unique mix.

Here are Howard Gardner's Eight Intelligences. The definitions are his.

<b>Intelligences</b>	<b>Description</b>
Linguistic	An ability to analyze information and create products involving oral and written language such as speeches, books, and memos.
Logical- Mathematical	An ability to develop equations and proofs, make calculations, and solve abstract problems.
Spatial	An ability to recognize and manipulate large-scale and fine-grained spatial images.
Musical	An ability to produce, remember, and make meaning of different patterns of sound.
Naturalist	An ability to identify and distinguish among different types of plants, animals, and weather formations that are found in the natural world.
Bodily-Kinesthetic	An ability to use one's own body to create products or solve problems.
Interpersonal*	An ability to recognize and understand other people's moods, desires, motivations, and intentions.
Intrapersonal**	An ability to recognize and understand his or her own moods, desires, motivations, and intentions.

\*Interpersonal can also be referred to as Social Intelligence (SQ). It can also be found in some of the references and tools for Emotional Intelligence (EQ).

\*\*Intrapersonal can also be referred to as Emotional Intelligence (EQ). If you are looking for ideas of how to build Intrapersonal Intelligence, looking into the body of work around EQ will be rich with resources and tools.

Let's dig into the multiple intelligences with a few exercises:

### Exercise A

Take a few minutes and jot down where and how you demonstrate the intelligences above in your work, in your volunteer activities, and at home.

*What surprised you about your observations?*

*What area(s) of intelligence would you like to continue to grow and sustain?*

*Is there an area of intelligence that you are under utilizing?*

Keep in mind that an intelligence that you don't actively access in your workday, might still be game changing for how you are able to show up as a leader. For example, sometimes my leadership coaching clients have to remind

themselves that engaging their bodily-kinesthetic intelligence by simply going on a walk, while trying to solve a problem, can help them with a breakthrough that wasn't coming to them while sitting at their desk, staring at their computer.

### Exercise B

Now do the same about each of your direct reports.

*What did you note that was new or surprising about them?*

*What kind of work assignments or opportunities can you provide them to either grow or further develop an area(s) of intelligence? (Broaden your thinking to include the entirety of the organization.)*

*In what ways have you and will you acknowledge their contributions based on the way they are smart?*



When I am coaching leaders, one of the areas that oftentimes comes up as a gap or area of development needed is executive presence. When you think about how executive presence is defined within your organization's culture:

*What areas of intelligence would be included for one of your direct reports improving their executive presence?*

*How might you offer opportunities for them to practice within the workplace?*

And don't overlook helping them identify areas outside of work where they could practice. For example, being part of a volunteer board might be a great place for them to practice their interpersonal (SQ) skills. Another possibility would be to join an organization like Toastmasters to focus on their linguistic and interpersonal (SQ) skills. If they include reflecting upon those experiences, they also have the opportunity to learn more about how they handle themselves intrapersonally (EQ).

Please note that our brains have great plasticity and resilience - it is designed for change and we, as humans, are notorious for avoiding the work and effort to stretch and change our mindsets, thinking,

behaviors, and can stay stuck in our well-honed and familiar neural pathways. Trying new things, and tapping into our curiosity can support us in forging new neural pathways, and a new way of thinking.

When you are exploring the actions and practices that you'll take to build intelligence(s), check out [Herrmann International](#) – the originators of *Whole Brain® Thinking* and one of my favorite resources for ideas and practices to stretch one's brain. Also, take time to read [Leadership in the 21st Century Brains 3.0](#) by Ann Herrmann-Nehdi. (To be transparent, many years ago, I went through certification training with Ann Herrmann-Nehdi. Having the opportunity to learn from her sparked my broader interest in whole brain thinking, and in multiple intelligences, with a strong focus upon emotional and social intelligence.)

There is so much more to explore and learn about multiple intelligences, and the most powerful tool we have - our brains. I hope this has piqued your smarts, and that you'll try out new experiences and practices, as part of your personal and professional growth as a leader.

If you are curious to learn more and to grow your smarts, here are a few key books to get you on the way.

Herrmann, N. (1995) *The Creative Brain*.  
Kingsport, TN. Quebecor Printing Book Group.

Goleman, D. (1995) *Emotional intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ*.  
New York, NY. Bantam Books.

Goleman, D. (1998) *Working with emotional intelligence*.  
New York, NY. Bantam Books.

Howard, P.J. (2006 / 2014) *Owner's Manual for the Brain* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.).  
New York, NY. Harper Collins Publishers Inc.



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Maile brings deep curiosity, smarts and a bit of magic to supporting her clients in making intentional choices about the lives they want to lead, and how to carve reflective space out from the busyness. She delivers practical solutions that align leaders, teams and individuals to

deliver optimal business results, and to create a work environment that brings out the best in people, and allows them to be most effective. She has worked across multiple industry sectors including: professional services, financial services, telecommunications, health care, retail, and secondary education. She also has experience living and working internationally. Maile is a Master Certified Coach and a member of the International Coaching Federation.

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