

What Social Intelligence (SI) Looks Like

By Daniel Goleman 2006

Three 12-year-olds are heading to a soccer field for gym class.

Two athletic-looking boys are walking behind—and snickering at—the third, a somewhat chubby classmate.

“So you’re going to *try* to play soccer,” one of the two says sarcastically to the third, his voice dripping with contempt. The chubby boy closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. Then he turns to the other two and replies, in a calm, matter-of-fact voice,

*“Yeah, I’m going to try—but I’m not very good at it.” After a pause, he adds,
“But I’m great at art—show me anything, and I can draw it real good...”*

Then, pointing to his antagonist, he says,

“Now you—you’re great at soccer— really fantastic! I’d like to be that good someday, but I’m just not. Maybe I can get a little better at it if I keep trying.”

At that, the first boy, his disdain now utterly disarmed, says in a friendly tone,

“Well, you’re not really that bad. Maybe I can show you a few things about how to play.”

That short interaction offers a masterly display of “social intelligence.” By keeping cool, the aspiring artist resisted the pull to anger from the other’s sarcastic taunt and instead brought the other boy into his own, more friendly emotional range.

The art of Racial Intelligence is combining Emotional Intelligence (EI), Social Intelligence (SI) and the RITE Tools. The story above shows how the picked-on boy used his EI to improve his SI, and keep his emotions, like anger, in check. The end result presents a positive interaction between the boys.
