

# Balance Your Need to Achieve

*Emotional intelligence remains a key ingredient in the development of corporate leaders. In this series, best-selling author and Korn Ferry columnist **Daniel Goleman** reveals the 12 key skills behind EI. This is an edited excerpt from his book, [Achievement Orientation: A Primer](#).*

When we're strong in the [Achievement Orientation](#) competency, we strive to meet or exceed a standard of excellence and appreciate metrics for—and feedback on—our performance. We look for ways to learn how to do things better. We set challenging goals and take calculated risks. And we can balance our personal drive to achieve with the needs and goals of the organization. We all know people who lack this competence—someone who is intellectually gifted but who flounders, unable to put that gift in the service of a focused goal. They could achieve great things if they had the motivation and drive, but they seem to lack this critical element in success.

On the other hand, there are those who fail because they have too much achievement drive and too little of other [Emotional Intelligence](#) competencies. I once heard about a highly successful lawyer whose strong drive to achieve meant that he rose to the top of his law school class, got hired by a high-profile law firm, and worked his way up through the ranks until he became a partner in his law firm.

Then something went wrong: As a leader, that lawyer's same drive for achievement became a drawback. He didn't listen when others suggested their own good ideas about how to do things better. He didn't see the need for the team to work together. He didn't focus his attention on working to meet the firm's goals. Seen as aloof, he alienated his entire staff.

The lawyer had the Achievement Orientation competency in spades, but no sense of how to balance his personal drive with the needs of his organization. He lacked several other Emotional Intelligence competencies that balance the sheer drive to achieve, like [Empathy](#), Inspiration, and Teamwork. As careers progress, Achievement Orientation helps people attain their goals, which matters greatly for the success of an individual contributor. But once a person becomes a leader, the Achievement Orientation competency needs to work in tandem with these other competencies.

*Research shows that Achievement Orientation for personal goals matters crucially in early career jobs, while it morphs into a concern for the team or organization goals at higher levels.*

If a leader fails to shift from personal to group goals, as with that lawyer, he or she can run roughshod over direct reports. The *Harvard Business Review* published an article about this called "Leadership Run Amok." Decades of research at Harvard, Cornell, and other universities shows that the drive to achieve runs high in entrepreneurs who found highly successful businesses or who start innovative units within an organization. These entrepreneurs take smart risks. They're sure the risk is minimal, though to others it may seem like a very high risk and that it is unlikely they'll reach that goal.

