

## Take Your Team to the Oscars!

- Marcia Hughes and James Terrell

*Avatar*, *Invictus*, *The Blind Side* – these Oscar nominated movies demonstrate ways for understanding team and individual emotional and social intelligence. You can measure your team’s effectiveness through the Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Survey® (TESI®), which includes the seven key skills we’ve found teams need for building their ESI. The Oscar nominated movies demonstrate some interesting tips for team and individual awareness. As more individual team members develop their ESI, the stronger the team will be, so look for teams for you and your team.

We will list two movies for each of the 7 skill areas and discuss the first one. We hope you’ll join our [blog site](#) and contribute to this fun learning opportunity for all of us! We thank the many people involved in making these movies for the great entertainment and the remarkable ways in which your work teaches us. We enjoyed the movies we are reviewing here and recommend them to you.

### **Team Identity:** *Avatar*, *Invictus*

Team identity measures the level of pride each member feels for the team as a whole, and how much connection and belongingness members feel to the team.

*Avatar* is set in 2154 when humans are mining a precious mineral called unobtainium on the lush moon, Pandora. The expansion of the mining colony threatens the continued existence of a local tribe of Na’vi, a sentient humanoid species that is indigenous to Pandora. The expansion of the mining colony threatens the Na’vi’s continued existence. There are three “teams” –a coalition of the earthlings from the military/industrial complex that’s developing the mining interests and cares little about the well-being of the native people. The Na’vi, are an indigenous species who are highly attuned to natural rhythms within the environment and to one another’s emotional states. The third is an evolving team made up of the scientists who were established to facilitate relations with the Na’vi. They gradually develop an increasing respect and deep understanding for the Na’vi and the integrity of their way of life. In the end this causes them to separate from their earth companions and align with the Na’vi.

We see the formulation of team identity as the middle group, the scientists break ranks with military/industrial complex team, create their own sense of purpose, and then risk (and sacrifice) their lives to accomplish the purpose. The military team was so committed to their purpose that they couldn’t find the space to talk to others. They show us how identity can be too high, leading to conflict and a lack of ability to even see the point of view from other teams and to find ways to work together.

**Motivation:** *Invictus, The Blind Side*

Motivation is a competency that measures the team's internal resources for generating and sustaining the energy necessary to get the job done well and on time.

*Invictus* is a look at the life of Nelson Mandela and his nation after the fall of apartheid in South Africa. During his first term as President, South Africa was scheduled to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup which he recognized as a significant opportunity to unite the people of South Africa. In the movie, Mandela gives the "Invictus" poem to the captain of the national rugby team and encourages him to find ways to rebuild the team's image in the eyes of black South Africans. They begin to reach out to the various townships through rugby clinics and the people's enthusiasm and support helps build the motivation for the team to perform better than any could have expected and win the World Cup.

**Emotional Awareness:** *Avatar, Up in the Air, A Single Man*

Emotional awareness measures how well team members pay attention to one another and demonstrate acceptance and value for one another.

*Up in the Air* stars George Clooney as corporate downsizing expert, Ryan Bingham, who is hired to ease the transition of long-term employees who are being fired. He loves his job and his 290 days of travel and has minimal relationships. Then a young upstart in his company shakes up his world by creating a way to fire people via the internet. Clooney plays Ryan Bingham, the loner businessman who is detached from his family and has no long term relationships. The threatened change, concurrent with a blossoming love affair, begins a transformation in which you can view the character start caring and awakening emotionally. As a team member, Bingham is a loner and an individual producer. He meets his numbers, but adds little creativity to the team, and provides almost no emotional support. Initially his team connection is virtually zero, but we can expect that his awakening emotionally will change his team engagement. He'll either leave for a more satisfying job or start connecting with this team.

**Communication:** *Precious, Up in the Air*

Communication provides information on how well team members listen, encourage participation, share information and discuss sensitive matters.

*Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*, is based on a character, Precious, who learns to share sensitive matters with her teacher and with her social worker. Through very skillful and loving efforts to draw her out of her personal hell of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, her teacher helps her begin communicating; a trust is built and Precious gains more self respect and learns how to take care of herself and her

child. Her entire path to success is learning a new way to communicate, often one challenging step at a time.

**Stress Tolerance:** *The Hurt Locker, An Education*

Stress tolerance measures how well the team understands the types of stress factors and manages the intensity impacting its members and the team as a whole.

*The Hurt Locker* is a fine example of how stress tolerance is measured in a team. When SFC William James joins the Bravo Company in Iraq, his job is to lead the bomb's disposal unit. He joins Sergeant J. T. Sanborn and Specialist Owen Eldridge, whose jobs are to communicate with their team leader via radio inside his bomb suit and provide him with rifle cover while he examines an IED. They work together under a tremendous amount of pressure to diffuse bombs knowing that their ability to remain calm under pressure affects not only their lives but the lives of countless others.

**Conflict Resolution:** *Invictus, The Last Station, Avatar, The Blind Side*

Conflict resolution measures how willing the team is to engage in conflict openly and constructively without needing to get even.

*Invictus* – *Invictus* demonstrates the genius and compassion of Nelson Mandela when he chooses both black and white members for his security team. Because they have literally been in armed conflict with each other over the past many years, these people have little or no trust for each other, and almost less tolerance. Through demonstrating equal respect for the men regardless of their racial background, Mandela begins shaping team identity. As team members realize that their commitment as security professionals will need to override their cultural differences in order to protect their leader and the hopes for peaceful transition in their country they stop competing against each other and start becoming increasingly cooperative. This move from No to Yes is facilitated in part by some perceived threats to Mandela's life that could not be met without the whole team's concerted efforts.

**Positive Mood:** *The Blind Side, Invictus*

Positive mood measures the positive attitude of the team in general as well as when it's under pressure.

*The Blind Side* focuses on a young African-American high school student, Michael Oher, who has been challenged by many obstacles throughout his young life, including homelessness. Michael begins to transform and rise above those challenges when he is taken in by a well-to-do white family in the community. They work together as a highly cohesive team under the leadership of a mother (Sandra Bullock) who is a literal force of nature. With the family's support he begins to learn trust and gains a positive self



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image. Based on a true story, this family demonstrates a consistent positive mood and can-do attitude that is contagious and is the foundation for transforming Michael's educational experience and opening up a new world of options for him.