

# Understanding and Developing Emotional Intelligence

By BNET Editorial

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Although Daniel Goleman popularized the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) with the publication of his book in 1995, its origins can be traced to two researchers: John D. Mayer of the Department of Psychology at the University of New Hampshire and Peter Salovey, of the Department of Psychology at Yale University. In 1990 they offered their first definitions of EI, and in 1997 they refined it to:

*“The ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”*

It's generally believed that success is dependent upon the ability to reason, but that ability alone is not enough. Emotional intelligence is equally—if not more—important. This assertion has fascinated psychologists and management developers, and as a result, countless diagnostic tools have emerged to guide would-be achievers. But the question remains, can emotional intelligence be developed or is it an innate capability?

## What You Need to Know

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### **I tend to make decisions based on rational analysis. How can I develop a more emotional language?**

If it is not your natural language, you will need to practice emotional intelligence until it becomes habitual. This requires persistence, repetition, and feedback. What you are aiming to do is use your emotions to inform you of factors outside the rational, concrete world. To achieve this, you could observe someone who is proficient; you could ask someone to observe you and give you feedback from an emotionally intelligent perspective; or you could attend a training program.

### **I think emotional intelligence is just a fluffy craze. What advantages would I get from developing a higher level of emotional competence?**

Statistics have been bandied about that by far the greatest contributing factor to success is emotional intelligence. Although they tend to exaggerate the impact of emotional intelligence, they also emphasize its importance. Emotional intelligence enables you to access information that would otherwise be unavailable to you. This can enhance the quality of your relationships, your decisions,

and your enjoyment of life. By tapping into emotional language, you are also able to know yourself better and begin to master your feelings, rather than allowing them to master you!

## **I don't have any academic qualifications but I'm told I am emotionally intelligent. Is this enough to enable me to succeed?**

There is no doubt that having good emotional intelligence is an advantage, and it can certainly help you succeed. However, there are few professions that rely exclusively on this quality. Use your emotional intelligence to enhance the skills and rational capabilities that you have and place them in a fruitful environment, but be aware that professional credibility also relies on past achievements and intellectual capabilities.

## **I have a boss who is purely cerebral and doesn't seem to have any sympathy with the feeling side of life. What can I do to encourage him to develop a more empathetic approach?**

You could try giving him some feedback and explaining that you feel demotivated when he fails to recognize or take account of the emotional intelligence factors. You could also demonstrate these so that he begins to understand what he is missing. Remember to validate your boss if—or when—you see him exhibiting some new behaviors.

## **What to Do**

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The terms “emotion” and “intelligence” have been combined to describe the essential but elusive quality that enables some people to succeed beyond “reason.” For the purposes of explaining the definition given above, “emotion” refers to the feeling state that conveys information about relationships, whereas “intelligence” refers to the capacity to reason about information.

John Mayer and Peter Salovey described their “four branch model of emotional intelligence” in their book *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence*, published in 1997. It describes the four capacities or skills that collectively make up most of the areas of emotional intelligence. It embraces the ability to:

- **perceive, accurately, emotions in oneself and in others.** Broadly this is the ability to recognize non-verbal signals (including the tone, pitch and quality of voice) that suggest what is going on for someone emotionally. These may convey such emotions as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear, which are expressed commonly throughout humanity;
- **use emotions to facilitate thinking.** Although this is about being aware of emotions, it goes further in that they are used to inform thinking. Emotions help us to recognize our priorities and

what is really important to us because they are charged with urgency. Being able to interpret and use our emotions also enables us to be creative and to be explicit about our creativity;

- **understand the meaning of emotions.** Because emotions carry information, they can inform an appropriate reaction or action. They can also provide the wherewithal to think and reason about what is going on. So this branch of emotional intelligence ties together the ability to understand the emotional signals and to use these to inform thinking;
- **manage emotions.** We often think that our emotions “carry us away” and that we have no control over them and, because of this fear, we may screen out painful or difficult emotions to protect ourselves from having to deal with them. However, emotions are merely conduits of information and do not automatically drive our behavior. We have to give ourselves permission to behave according to the messages sent by our emotional reading of a situation or event. As young children, we had not mastered our emotions, and expressed what we thought. As adults, we have learned more self-control; we have learned what is acceptable, what works, and what does not. Developing control over your emotions as opposed to letting your emotions control you is a valuable life skill that creates great choice and opportunity.

So, can these capabilities be developed? The answer, it would seem, is “yes” and “no.” Just as it is thought that there is a genetic aspect to someone’s intelligence quotient (IQ), so it is thought that there is a genetic aspect to someone’s emotional quotient (EQ). The thinking goes something like this. When a child is born, it has a certain level of emotional potential that is determined by a combination of its gestational circumstances (nurture) and its genetic inheritance (nature). If the child is born into favorable circumstances, this potential can develop unhindered and express itself in its fullest capacity. If, however, this same child is born into hardship and is deprived of the normal developmental opportunities, its inherent capacity will not manifest and the child may not appear to be blessed with emotional intelligence. However, in later life, because the child’s potential is held in reserve, it can respond effectively to developmental stimuli and display (apparently learned) emotional intelligence. If the child was not fortunate enough to be born with this potential, it may learn survival strategies and indeed, it may succeed to some extent, but it will not demonstrate a natural propensity to be emotionally intelligent or the ability to “learn” high levels of emotional intelligence. Of course, there are compelling arguments in the literature that suggest that the various intelligences are either all genetic or all environmentally determined.

So, let us separate emotional intelligence from emotional competence for clarity and suggest that attempting to develop a more sophisticated level of emotional competence is not a waste of time, because we just do not know what the potential is. Research at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University tells us that when motivated to do so, people can effect and sustain the competences that constitute emotional intelligence.

Some claims have put intelligence as accounting for 10–20% of someone’s success and emotional intelligence as accounting for the remainder. However, this would put enormous weight on the importance of emotional intelligence, which is not born out in reality. In fact, there are many variables that could explain the 80% variance, for example, context, circumstance, background, chance, networks, and so on. All we can reasonably conclude is that emotional intelligence is a valuable asset that can assist us in our progression through life.

So what can you do to develop emotional competence?

## **Distinguish Thoughts from Feelings**

Become conscious of the difference between your thoughts and feelings. Go to your head for the thoughts and to your heart for your feelings.

## **Become Conscious of Your Body's Response to Emotions**

Familiarize yourself with your body's response to joy, excitement, frustration, anger, disappointment, and so on. See if you can sense when these emotions are about to emerge and decide whether or not you wish them to do so.

## **Take Account of Your Feelings When Making Decisions**

Fold your feelings consciously into your decision-making process. You can do this by asking yourself whether your decisions are based upon rational analysis or an intuitive sense of what needs to be done.

## **Be Cognizant of Others' Feelings**

Observe and try to understand the feelings others are experiencing. Watch others' verbal and non-verbal language closely to see if you can "read" them accurately.

## **Listen Carefully**

Listen attentively to what is going on and be conscious of the change in the quality of your communications when you withhold assumptions and judgments and allow others to convey their messages fully before you respond.

## **Give and Receive Feedback**

Give and receive feedback based on your observation of others' behaviors and the feelings they engender in you. For example: "When you shout at me, I feel intimidated and unable to think clearly."

## **Experience Extra-Rational Activities**

Expose yourself to art, music, dance, and nature. Be conscious of the effect these activities have on you and your feelings.

If you are having difficulty fathoming the more emotional form of language, you might want to find a coach to help you work through the signals that you have been ignoring in favor of rational thought. If you succeed, you will no doubt find that your emotional competence brings you rich rewards in terms of relationships as well as enjoyment of life.

## **What to Avoid**

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### **You Fail to Find a Balance**

Too much emphasis on feelings can lead to a drop in credibility. In a professional environment, it is important to be able to balance "feeling language" with "rational language." You can safely lean toward more emotional language in relationships in which it is important to acknowledge and validate someone's feelings, but you may need to balance this with a more rational justification for the decisions you make in other contexts.

### **You React Emotionally to Others' Emotions**

People who rely solely on their feelings to inform their behaviors tend to be seen as erratic and unreliable. They are also unpredictable, because you never know what will provoke them. Also, uncontrolled behaviors are frightening because the boundaries are not clear. If you are confronted with someone who is overemotional, try to remain calm yourself so that you are not feeding their energy. Acknowledge the other person's feelings and suggest you find a place to sit down and discuss things. This will encourage them to think rationally.

## You See Completely Rational People as Cold

People who rely solely on their rational capabilities are often accused of being cold. However, this is a perception, not necessarily a reality. They may be shy or emotionally vulnerable so try not to judge them harshly. You could assist by demonstrating your own emotional intelligence and leading them into a more relaxed state in which they can access their feelings. Ask them about things you know they are interested in. They may have a passion for something that brings their feelings to the surface.

## You Allow Conflict to Interfere with Understanding

Conflict can be an area where emotional intelligence flies out of the window, and two people become entrenched in their own views. In order to break through this impasse, it is important to get the perceptions and feelings of each party out in the open. In this way, they will be able to develop an understanding of each other's point of view. Often, the conflict is wrapped up in emotional issues that prevent the different arguments from being presented clearly.

## Where to Learn More

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### Books:

Ciarrochi, Joseph, and John Mayer, Editors, *Applying Emotional Intelligence: A Practitioner's Guide*. Psychology Press, 2007.

Ciarrochi, Joseph, and Joseph P. Forgas, and John D. Mayer, Editors, *Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life*. Psychology Press, 2006.

Salovey, Peter, and David J. Sluyter, *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*. Basic Books Inc., 1997.

Goleman, Daniel P., *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 2005.

Smith, Andy, *55 Ways to Increase Your Emotional Intelligence (eBook)*. Andrew Smith, 2002.

Cherniss, Cary, and Daniel Goleman, *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select For, Measure and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organization*. Jossey Bass Wiley, 2001.

Goleman, Daniel, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books, 1998.

## Web Sites:

University of New Hampshire:

[www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/EI%20Assets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Perceiving%20Affective%20Content.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/EI%20Assets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Perceiving%20Affective%20Content.pdf)

University of New Hampshire:

[www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/EI%20Assets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Emotional%20Intelligence.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/EI%20Assets/EmotionalIntelligenceProper/EI1990%20Emotional%20Intelligence.pdf)

myskillsprofile: [www.myskillsprofile.com/tests.php?test=21&gclid=CPrh7MSovYsCFQrIQgodyH4g2Q](http://www.myskillsprofile.com/tests.php?test=21&gclid=CPrh7MSovYsCFQrIQgodyH4g2Q)

EQI.org: <http://eqi.org>

Hay Group: [www.haygroup.com](http://www.haygroup.com)

The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations: [www.eiconsortium.org](http://www.eiconsortium.org)