



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

By Edel Jarboe

Almost all self-help books tell you to get in touch with you emotions. Why is this so important? Because our emotions enable us to experience life. Our emotions are the most powerful factors in determining how we act, make decisions, set personal boundaries and communicate with others. Therefore, if we understand and control our emotions, we can improve the quality of our lives.

Enter emotional intelligence. This new buzzword was coined by Yale psychologist Peter Salovey and the University of New Hampshire's John Mayer to describe qualities like: understanding one's own emotions, empathy for the feelings of others and managing one's emotions. In addition to grade point average, IQ, and other standardized testing, emotional intelligence (EQ) is being described as a new and better way of measuring an individuals' chance of success in life. The higher your EQ – the greater your ability to manage your feelings and deal effectively with others – the greater your chances are for a happier life.

Emotional Awareness

Self-awareness means knowing which emotions you are feeling and why. It is the ability to see and understand the connection between what you are feeling and how you act on those feelings. Self-awareness also involves a degree of self-honesty; knowing what is both petty and noble about what you feel and how you act, while maintaining confidence in your self-worth and capabilities. Moreover, emotional awareness allows you to speak up for yourself because you are comfortable communicating your feelings.

Emotional Sensitivity

Empathy is the ability to feel compassion for other people's feelings and to understand their viewpoint. People who are emotionally sensitive pay attention to non-verbal cues and listen well, which enables them to communicate well with others. They respect other people's feelings and do not invalidate others. Those with emotional intelligence also have a well-developed social conscience. When pursuing their goals, they are concerned not only with the personal consequences but the consequence for others as well. Thus, emotional sensitivity enables them to be both inner and outer directed.

Emotional Management

The ability to take responsibility for and manage one's own emotions and personal happiness is an important cornerstone of emotional intelligence. People with EQ are consequently highly self-directed. Not only do they prioritize and set realistic and challenging goals, but they are also able to balance emotion and intellect when making decisions. In short, they are able to exercise self-control.

Scientists have proven that we are wired to feel before we think. This is our survival instinct. However, once you are aware of what you are feeling, the odds of successfully dealing with your emotions are greatly improved. The ability to step back and recognize what you are feeling allows you to exercise self-control and to employ coping skills; taking a slow, relaxing bath when feeling stressed or going for a walk or a run when you are feeling blue, for example.

An essential emotion management strategy is optimism, the ability to look for the positive in the negative. In other words, knowing how to deal constructively with anger, negativity and failure is emotion management at its best. The ability to persist despite obstacles, and to change course if necessary, is a by-product of emotion management and the reason why people with emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed.

Getting "It"

In conclusion, true emotional intelligence is not about manipulating people. Emotional intelligence means knowing that you and others are feeling and acting ethically, with a social conscience. In other words, book smarts and people smarts may be of equal value, but emotional intelligence is what makes certain people stand out. These people seem to have "it" together; they are a graceful balance of intellect and emotion. They inspire, lead and make others feel good about themselves while maintaining their own integrity and sense of personal worth. No one is diminished by being in his or her presence. On the contrary, we all wish we could be more like them.

People with emotional intelligence have an unshakable confidence in themselves, which comes from self-knowledge and self-honesty. They know that their personal happiness is up to them and no one else. Instead of labeling other people and their actions, they check their emotions first. People with emotional intelligence look out for their well being as well as that of others. They understand that life is not just about them; it's about balance.

How Can You Improve Your Emotional Intelligence?

1. Take responsibility for your emotions and your happiness.
2. Examine your own feelings rather than the actions or motives of other people.
3. Develop constructive coping skills for specific moods. Learn to relax when your emotions are running high and to get up and move when you are feeling down.
4. Make hunting for the silver lining a game. Look for the humor or life lesson in a negative situation.
5. Be honest with yourself. Acknowledge your negative feelings, look for their source and come up with a way to solve the underlying problem.
6. Show respect by respecting other people's feelings.
7. Avoid people who invalidate you or don't respect your feelings.
8. Listen twice as much as you speak.
9. Pay attention to non-verbal communication. We communicate with our whole selves. Watch faces, listen to people's tone of voice and take note of body language.
10. Realize that improving your emotional intelligence will take time and patience