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Emotional Intelligence

Why It Can Matter More Than IQ

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Life Advice / Psychology / Emotional Intelligence

Take-Aways

- IQ contributes only 20% to life success – "emotional intelligence" plays a much bigger role.
- The five areas of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, managing emotions, self-motivation, empathy and handling relationships.
- Human beings have the equivalent of two minds - one that thinks and one that feels.
- The two sections of the brain operate independently.
- Strong emotions interfere with clear thinking. Anxiety undermines the intellect.
- Your goal is to find an intelligent balance of reason and emotion.
- Flow - how people feel when fully engaged in tasks that fit their skills and preferences - is emotional intelligence at its best.
- Cultivating emotional intelligence is a cost-effective management imperative.
- Feedback is the currency of emotional intelligence in management.
- The success of a group is not determined by the IQ of its members, but by their emotional intelligence.

Recommendation

In this seminal work, Daniel Goleman introduced millions of readers to the concept of emotional intelligence - the amalgamation of psychological skills and traits that he claims is crucial for life success. Skills like self-awareness and self-motivation are instilled (or destroyed) in childhood, but Goleman claims that adults still can learn and apply them. This book is at its best when Goleman makes his overall case for emotional intelligence, including its sound biological underpinning. Although the later sections on real-world applications are not as insightful as the earlier sections, *getAbstract* strongly recommends this important book, which is relevant not only to business, but to life itself.

Summary

Emotional Intelligence

Recent years have seen a surge of research into the biology of personality and emotion. These studies clearly indicate that some of human intelligence and personality is determined by genetics. But this raises two questions: What can you change about yourself? And, why do some intelligent people flounder in life, while less intelligent people prosper? The answers reside within a set of abilities called emotional intelligence.

“The notion that there is pure thought, rationality devoid of feeling, is fiction.”

Evolution gave humankind emotions to help people cope with dangerous situations and to act in the face of peril. Modern people retain the emotional system of their cave-dwelling ancestors, who regularly faced life-and-death situations. In modern society, those emotions often overwhelm logical thought. In a real sense, each person has two minds, one that thinks and one that feels. The rational mind lets a person ponder and reflect. But the emotional mind is impulsive and powerful. Usually, the two work in harmony, but intense feelings sometimes allow the emotional mind to dominate the rational mind.

“We have feelings about everything we do, think about, imagine, remember. Thought and feeling are inextricably woven together.”

The brain's centers of emotion evolved first. The limbic system surrounds the brainstem, the center of passionate emotion. The brainstem also influences memory and learning. The neocortex, where the brain thinks, evolved later, and then the amygdala grew on the sides of the brain. These paired structures act as storehouses of emotional memory. The amygdala gives life emotional meaning and passion. In a crisis, the amygdala reacts almost instantly, far more quickly than the neocortex. This emotional brain can act independently of the thinking brain. The amygdala lends extra weight to memories of emotional arousal, enabling you to have vivid memories of pleasure or danger.

“IQ and emotional intelligence are not opposing competencies, but rather separate ones.”

While the amygdala pushes you to action, the cortex works like a damper. It stifles or controls feelings. A person experiences an emotional hijacking when the amygdala is triggered and the neocortex fails to control

it. Such strong emotions can interfere with attention span and every aspect of clear thinking. But instead of trying to eliminate their feelings, people should strive to find an intelligent balance of reason and emotion.

Components of Emotional Intelligence

The IQ contributes only 20% to your success in life. Of much bigger influence is so-called emotional intelligence, including factors such as the ability to motivate yourself, persistence, impulse control, mood regulation, empathy and hope. IQ and emotional intelligence are not opposing competencies, but they do work separately. A person can be intellectually brilliant but emotionally inept, an imbalance that can cause many life problems.

“This split approximates the folk distinction between ‘heart’ and ‘head’.”

Yale psychologist Peter Salovey analyzed emotional intelligence in five realms:

- Self-awareness.
- Managing emotions.
- Motivation.
- Empathy.
- Handling relationships.

Self-Awareness: Knowing Your Emotions

Feelings are often hidden. Emotional self-awareness requires ongoing attention to your internal states, including your emotions. Awareness is a neutral state that generates self-examination even during intense emotions. Psychologist John Mayer calls it being "aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood." For practical purposes, self-awareness and the ability to change your moods are the same. Emotions can be and often are unconscious as well as conscious. They begin before you are rationally aware of an oncoming feeling. Unconscious emotions can have a powerful effect on your thoughts and reactions, even though you are not aware of them. When you become conscious of these feelings, then you can evaluate and better control them. Therefore, self-awareness is the foundation for managing emotions, such as being able to shake off a bad mood.

Managing Emotions: Handling Your Feelings

Ever since the ancient Greeks, people have seen self-mastery and the ability to withstand emotional storms as a virtue. Yet, life without passion would be boring. Pursue, instead, a medium stance: the goal of appropriate emotion. Managing your emotions is a full-time job. Many of the things people do every day, from work to recreation, are attempts to manage mood, to balance the constant background hum of emotion. The art of soothing the surge of emotions - particularly intense surges - is a basic life skill, one of the most essential psychic tools. The brain's design means that a person has little control over when he or she is swept by an emotional wave or over what those emotions will be. However, through effort, behavior change or even medication, individuals can exert control over how long and intensely an emotion will endure.

“Knowing something is right ‘in your heart’ is a different order of conviction - somehow a deeper kind of certainty - than thinking so with your rational mind.”

One of the most difficult emotions to escape is rage, partly because anger is energizing, even exhilarating. It can last for hours and create a hair-trigger state, making people much more easily provoked. If someone is already edgy and something triggers a second emotional onslaught, the ensuing emotion is especially intense. A good way to cool off from anger is to seek distractions. Going off alone helps, as does exercise. Emotions such as sadness and bereavement can alleviate rage, but they raise the danger of full-blown depression. To break cycles of depression, therapists teach people to challenge the thoughts that feed the depression, and to schedule a range of pleasant distractions. These can include exercising, having a sensual treat, accomplishing some small task, helping others in need or reaching out through prayer. Cognitive reframing, or looking at the situation in a more positive light, is also a powerful tool.

Self-Motivation: Using Emotion to Meet Your Goals

Positive motivation is crucial to achievement. The greatest athletes, musicians and chess masters are distinguished by their ability to stick with arduous practice, year after year, beginning early in life.

“We send emotional signals in every encounter, and those signals affect those we are with.”

Emotions determine how people get on in life because they can enhance or limit the capacity to use innate abilities. The ability to restrain emotions and delay impulses, to defer gratification, is a critical life skill and the key to a host of endeavors, from dieting to getting a college degree.

“Being able to enter ‘flow’ is emotional intelligence at its best.”

Anxiety undermines intellect, but a positive mood enhances thinking. Those who are adept at harnessing their emotions can even use their anxiety for motivation. Experts describe the relationship between anxiety and performance as an upside-down U. Too little anxiety means no motivation and poor performance. Too much anxiety impairs intellect. Peak performance comes in the middle. A mildly elated state called hypomania is ideal for writers and other creative people.

“In terms of biological design for the basic neural circuitry of emotion, what we are born with is what worked best for the last 5,000 human generations, not the last 500 generations - and certainly not for the last five.”

Hope and optimism also play powerful roles. Hope means not giving in to negativism or depression in the face of setbacks. Optimism means having a strong expectation that things will turn out well. Optimists attribute failure to something they can change, so they do not get depressed when things don't work. Optimism is an emotionally intelligent attitude that boosts performance in the business world. Self-efficacy - the belief that you have mastery over the events in your life and can meet the challenges that confront you - underlies both hope and optimism.

“The question is, how can we bring intelligence to our emotions - and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life?”

Psychologists have identified a peak-performance state called "flow," which musters the most positive use of emotional intelligence. Flow is the feeling you have when you are fully engaged in a task where you have advanced skills and love the work involved. Flow arrives in the zone between boredom and anxiety. The emotions you feel during flow are positive, channeled and directed at the task at hand. Flow is a state of self-forgetfulness and focused attention, a state of joy, even rapture. Your brain actually becomes calmer during flow, which enables you to finish challenging tasks with minimal energy. To teach people how to achieve flow - even children - have them repeatedly perform activities that they love.

Empathy: Mastering the Fundamental People Skill

The more self-aware you are, the more skilled you will become at reading other people's feelings. Rapport, the root of caring, arises from the capacity for empathy. Those who can read the feelings of other people are better adjusted, more popular, more outgoing and more sensitive.

“People who take the pessimistic stance are extremely prone to emotional hijackings.”

Empathy begins in infancy, with attunement, the nonverbal physical mirroring between child and parent. Attunement reassures an infant and makes it feel emotionally connected. Attunement requires feeling calm enough to be able to read subtle, nonverbal signals from other people.

Handling Relationships: Dealing with Other People

The ability to express feelings is a key social competence. Emotions are contagious. People send emotional signals during every encounter and unconsciously imitate the emotions that others emanate, so each person's signals affect others. As people interact, they often mirror each other's body language. The more they show this synchrony, the more they share moods. This coordination of moods is the adult version of infant-parent attunement, and is a key determinant of interpersonal effectiveness. The better you are at sensing the emotions of others and controlling the signals you send, the more you can control the effect you have on others. This is a fundamental part of exercising your emotional intelligence.

Applied Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is significant in most areas of daily life, including:

- **Management** - The arrogance some bosses project and the bad morale that they create diminish productivity and drive employees away. Applying emotional intelligence to avoid such negative outcomes in a business environment is simply cost-effective organizational management. Feedback is the basic currency of managerial emotional intelligence. Managers must learn to provide it and to accept it intelligently. They should not see feedback either as a criticism or as a personal attack. To deliver an artful critique, speak to the other person face-to-face. Exercise your sense of empathy. Convey specific praise as well as criticism. Focus on solutions. Those on the receiving end of criticism should learn to hear it as valuable information. In an economy dominated by knowledge workers, the concept of the

group emotional quotient is critical. Successful teams are based on the ability of team members to work together in harmony and to take advantage of each person's talents.

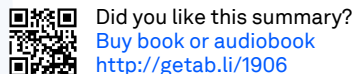
- **Marriage** - Emotional intelligence can help counteract the social and personal tensions that pull marriages apart. Men and women learn different emotional skills as children. Harsh criticism is a key warning sign of trouble in a marriage. For harmony, people must learn to criticize an action without attacking the person who committed the act. Personal attacks leave people feeling ashamed and defensive, and can trigger fight-or-flight responses.
- **Child raising** - Studies of children show a decline in their emotional health across the industrialized world. This trend is reflected in widespread withdrawal, anxiety and depression, attention disorders and delinquent behavior. Children and adults should be trained in the five key emotional intelligence skills.
- **Medicine** - The emotional brain is closely tied to the immune system. Stress makes people more susceptible to infectious diseases. Hostility has long been associated with heart disease, but any intense negative emotions can harm your physical well-being. Relaxation exercises are a good countermeasure. So is self-confession. Talking about problems even enhances your immune function. Doctors should learn that managing feelings is a form of disease prevention and that patients do better when their psychological needs are met.

Emotional Literacy

Character is the old-fashioned word for the aggregate skills of emotional intelligence. Those who cultivate the ability to set aside self-centered focus and emotional impulses, thus nourish their emotional intelligence, including self-understanding, self-control, enhanced motivation, acceptance of other people and improved relationships.

About the Author

Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., covers the behavioral sciences for the *New York Times*. He taught at Harvard and was formerly editor of *Psychology Today*. His other books include: *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* and *The Meditative Mind*. He is the co-author of *The Creative Spirit*.



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