Emotional Intelligence

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Every time a 'new idea' like EQ or emotional intelligence comes along, it's tempting to write it off as just another fad. However, although it is often true that all we get in the personal development field is 're-packaging' emotional intelligence seems to have hit many nails on the head and built something useful with them!

"Emotional Intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and others."

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence

Why do we need emotional intelligence?

If you're going to read further, you need some motivation. So how about this:

The rate of depression has skyrocketed over the last few decades. Depression is a horrible, life-destroying condition (at least temporarily). The right sort of emotional intelligence can inoculate you against it.

There is overwhelming, incontrovertible, undeniable evidence that good emotional intelligence is a marker for success in today's workplace. See the following studies if you want proof.

The incidence of other emotional difficulties is climbing almost exponentially. Anxiety problems, panic attacks, addiction, obsessive-compulsive disorders, anger. With the right emotional intelligence skills, you control your emotions, not the other way round.

Life is SO much more enjoyable with good emotional intelligence. Aside from avoiding all the above emotional nasties, you enjoy your work more, get more from your personal and professional relationships, progress further at work and so earn more, have more control over yourself and are better placed to help others. And much more!

If this doesn't persuade you that emotional intelligence is a good idea, maybe you're an emotional genius already!
Emotional Intelligence at Work

Scenario: Sandra is asked to do a presentation on behalf of her department to 40 high-ranking managers. Understandably, she feels nervous.

Sandra's Response (low 'EQ'): 2 weeks before the presentation, Sandra notices that every time she thinks about it, she feels nervous. She takes this as a sign that she is going to do badly, with the following results:

The closer the date comes, the more nervous she gets, disrupting her eating and sleeping patterns and making her feel bad generally.

Her preparation is disorganised due to the level of anxiety she is experiencing.

Every time she imagines doing the presentation, she sees it going horribly wrong, therefore preparing to fail.

When the day comes, she feels terrified right up to the time she comes to speak.

Although the first few minutes are awful, after a while things get better. She is pleasantly surprised.

Due to her nerves beforehand, her memory and recall is not working as well as it can and she has to refer to notes more often.

There is little humour in her presentation as her anxiety made it impossible to see the funny side of anything!

At the end of her presentation, she is so astounded to not be dead, she forgets to thank her team.

(Note: If the above has left you feeling a little queasy, check our Public Speaking Tips for comfort.)

OK, so maybe I played it up a bit for effect, but you get the picture. And although there are other factors involved, the initial interpretation of feelings of anxiety is a key point here. Good emotional intelligence training teaches skills to identify and manage emotion appropriately.

Let's take a look at another way of dealing with this:

Bob's response, (high 'EQ'): Similarly, 2 weeks before the presentation, Bob notices that he feels nervous when he thinks about the presentation. He says to himself that this is normal as he hasn't prepared yet and allows for the fact that he might be a little
Bob starts to deal with his nervous feelings by reading up on his topic and preparing the groundwork.

Whenever he finds himself thinking about the day, he puts his emotional intelligence skills to good use, allowing himself breathing space with the thought, "I can't know that it will be like yet, I don't know what I'm going to do". He puts it out of his mind until after he has prepared his speech.

Once the presentation is prepared, Bob uses relaxation techniques and self hypnosis to run through the presentation whilst feeling relaxed and humorous. Because of this, several jokes occur to him that he can use, and he is preparing to succeed. He is also able to imagine the presentation from his audience's point of view, which highlights several areas that need more work.

Due to his relaxed state, Bob's memory is working really well, and he begins to get a real feel for the flow of his presentation, without getting too bogged down in detail.

Bob's EI skills also enable him to tolerate uncertainty 'essential as he doesn't really know what will happen on the day.

On the day, Bob feels nervous before the presentation, but welcomes the nerves as part excitement, part performance-enhancers.

He is nervous for the first few minutes but soon gets into his flow; his jokes go down well and the audience's laughter makes him even more comfortable.

Because he is relaxed, his recall works really well and he even introduces elements he hadn't thought of beforehand, making the presentation sound even more spontaneous and natural.

Good old Bob!

But seriously, the subtle yet effective skills employed by Bob are emotional intelligence skills that can be learned. So too are the many others that enable you to:

- Motivate others
- Communicate elegantly and effectively
- Listen so you get the real message
- Take setbacks without feeling distraught
- Stop anger ruining your health, relationships and job prospects
- Enjoy extremely satisfying and productive relationships
- Protect yourself, your family and your friends from emotional problems.
- Be more comfortable with uncertainty

(Incidentally, the first 3 above ranked as the top qualities of senior managers as shown by this emotional intelligence survey.)

So I hope I've made my case that increasing your EQ is a great thing to do. And if you're still not sure about emotional intelligence, read the book that made it popular, Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman. It’s a fantastic read.

So what can you do if you want to increase your emotional intelligence?

Read the book above - I repeat, it's a fantastic read if you're interested in how your emotions work and how you can increase your emotional intelligence.

(If you like, here you can take an emotional intelligence (EQ) test.)

As with any self-directed short tests, this isn't really to be relied upon - but it can be fun!
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