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## Chapter 2

# Emotional Intelligence

### Definition:

*Emotional Intelligence is awareness of your emotions and the ability to use them to strengthen your performance.*

It has been the norm across the decades in business culture to shy away from emotional content. “That is something that you leave at home.” “We are here to get the work done.” “Stiff upper lip, move on now!” Emotional discourse, especially with male-dominated leadership, is still seen to be a sign of weakness. The truth is, however, that whether we like to admit it or not, emotions are rampant in all aspects of our lives, our society, and “*shriek*” our workplace. Emotions are a fundamental element of human existence—as core as thinking, breathing, and beating hearts. Whether you talk about them or not, they are there. Whether you ignore them, or suppress them, they are there.

So what? How are emotions relevant to solving problems, getting the work done, producing product? Well, think of it this way. Which person would you rather have on your team, someone who finds deep joy and meaning in their work, or someone who is in the wrong place, and

hates what they do? Would you rather have someone who is down on themselves or someone who believes in themselves and who is brimming with positive creative energy? Would you rather have someone who overcomes the bad days and maximizes the good, or an “unfeeling” individual who simply plods through his day-to-day work, never straying too far off course, but never producing much of anything new, useful, or creative?

The answers to these questions are obvious. You want people who pour energy into their work in order to realize their fullest creative potential. You want people who, full-time, synthesize the relevant information, create the most successful products and get them to market the fastest.

You want people devoted to their work and devoted to the organization. You want people who find and release joy in their work. You want people who fire on all cylinders, all day, and leave the office with more energy than they arrived

with. You want sustainable best-of-breed creativity, from senior management deciding on the next best product, to the front-line worker who finds a creative way to cut another 2% off production cost. You want people who can predictably find the next best product and get it to market the fastest. You need people with emotional energy, not emotional baggage.

So now what? Does this mean that as a leader I have to explicitly work at building positive creative energy in the people I lead? Yes. Does it mean that emotions become part of our normal day-to-day business language? Yes. Does it mean that I have to examine my own emotions to make sure that I release my full creative energies and realize my maximum potential? YES.

Because of the globally competitive economy that we now work in, managers are required to maximize their people’s performance. If emotions affect performance and if managers want to maximize performance, then managers need to understand emotional

intelligence, and they will want to grow it. In winning organizations, every single manager needs to understand emotional intelligence and how to make it grow, in order to help their people realize their fullest potential. Fortunately, emotional intelligence is not genetic. It is not an innate skill that you possess or not. It is not something formed, by the age of six, and locked-in for life. Emotional intelligence, like any other intelligence, can be grown in virtually anyone. In fact, it must be grown in everyone in the company if you want to have sustainable competitive advantage.

### ***What Are Emotions?***

Ask this question of a hundred people and you’ll get a hundred different answers. Our languages are rife with emotion-related words, expressions and sayings. You’ll rarely read anything, short of a technical manual, that doesn’t have some type of emotional reference. Emotion is deeply present in our relationships, our culture, our art, our music and our religions. Yet, we do not have a simple, society-wide shared model of emotional

functioning. We do not have a society-wide shared language about how to manage negative emotions and how to build up positive ones in order to achieve our goals. Scientific inquiry into our emotional lives has brought about a rich knowledge of what emotions are and what function they serve. From Freud, to Jung, to Oprah, we have been searching for some common understanding of how our emotions work. Unfortunately, this understanding has not yet been distilled down into a simple common model that the masses understand, share and use. When it comes to a society-wide concrete understanding of what emotions are, we are still in the dark ages. With emotional theory, we are at the same stage as before the invention of the printing press when reading and writing was reserved for the elite few in universities or religious groups. Back then, knowledge was not for the masses. Today, a simple model of how emotions work is not available for the masses. It is kept for the gifted leader who uses emotional intelligence with ease, but would struggle communicating the method of their success to their

students. It is for the highly-trained therapist disseminating “expert” knowledge to the needing patient.

If emotions are to make a positive contribution to the organization’s performance, then managers need a simple, understandable, easily teachable model of what emotions are, how they affect us (good and bad), and how we can use them to reach our fullest potential...

### ***So What Are Emotions Anyway?***

Simply put; emotions are memories. We humans are a product of evolution, and it is useful to try and understand emotions in that context. Most of what we have evolved as humans can be understood as a direct adaptation to the environment at hand—our competitive advantage to outlast other life forms. Essentially, emotions have evolved to serve two basic purposes: to protect, and to (re)produce. Emotions of joy, attachment, and pleasure have served to keep humans together, co-operating, and most importantly from an evolutionary

perspective, reproducing. Deeply negative emotions of loss or abandonment have also served to keep us together—fear of separation or loneliness pushes us closer together.

But why develop these complex, ethereal, hard to understand experiences called emotions? Aren’t they just confusing? Don’t they just distract us from using rational thought to make the right choices? Do emotions really have any value? According to the theory of natural selection, emotions must have produced some evolutionary competitive advantage. They are with us for a reason. They are adaptive and must be inherently useful to us. In order to understand what purpose emotions serve for us, we must understand what they are. So again, what exactly are emotions?

Emotions are a special form of memory. In fact, emotions are a very efficient form of memory. Emotions are a shorthand form of memory. When we experience something important, a graduation, the birth of a child, or the loss of someone

close, we will typically give a detailed blow-by-blow account of our recent experiences to those around us. It is natural to talk a lot about what we have just been through. This act of sharing helps us to emotionally process and work through what has just happened to us. Repetitively going over the important event through multiple conversations allows us to lay down long-term memories of the event, in the same way we memorize a telephone number by repeating it out loud several times over.

But why go through this process? What is the evolutionary advantage to having memories? The answer is straightforward. The purpose of a memory is to allow us to learn from what we have experienced so that we can make better decisions in the future. Through learning, we constantly improve our decision-making strategies and this results in a higher likelihood of propagation of the species. Memories have made it possible for the human species to take over the planet.

Through rehashing a recent important event, we lay down detailed memories of the event. But as time goes on, the memory of the details of the event will naturally fade. We simply do not remember everything that has happened to us. Yet, everything that has happened to us has the potential to teach us about the future. This shapes how we make our decisions. But, here’s the dilemma: our memory of the details fades over time. Does this mean that our ability to adapt fades with the memories of our experiences? Not necessarily.

This is where emotions come in. Emotions are an incredibly powerful and useful tool. Emotions are a highly efficient way to distill and compact our memories. Emotions are the shorthand for more detailed memories of events. Simply put, emotions are strong shorthand memories. Emotions tend to fade much more slowly over time, compared to detailed memories. Have you noticed that your memory of the *details* of an event fades over time, yet the *impact* of an important event can be felt in full force, years later,

as if it were only yesterday? Remember when you gave that first kiss to your first child. Remember when your father, or your grandfather, died? ... The most powerful memory of the event is your emotional memory.

### ***How Do Emotions Help Us Make Better Decisions??***

Through emotions, past important events can hold a powerful grip over us. Our emotions tell us what is significant and they influence how we act. Through our emotions, we are constantly provided with minute-to-minute information bytes from our past experiences. It's like a quarterback with a bug-in-the-ear receiving play-by-play instructions from the offensive coach. If we tune into our emotions, we can receive incredibly useful messages from the past that inform us about what to do next.

If saber tooth tigers usually attack at nightfall in the forest, then it is very adaptive to start feeling a little anxious as the sun starts to go down. (Ever wonder where fear of the dark comes from?).

Picture yourself as a prehistoric Neanderthal (this exercise may come more easily to some of us). You have just stumbled onto a huge berry patch. You're very intent on bringing home as many as you can carry, and this is very likely to distract your conscious mind from worries about tigers, especially if you're hungry. However, your brain is also tracking the situation at an unconscious level. Your brain is working hard and fast behind the scenes to keep you alive and healthy. As the light dims, you start to feel uncomfortable and anxious. You look up and around a little, suspecting something. You then notice that the sun is low in the sky and you say to yourself "Whoa, it's getting late. It's unsafe. I'll come back for the rest of these berries tomorrow". Your emotions warn you even though you're consciously paying attention to other stimuli like your eyes, nose and stomach.

So where did these warning emotions come from? Well, your tribe may have told you stories about tigers, or you may have been chased through the bush at

dark one night, only to barely escape with your life. The memories of these instructive experiences were distilled down into a compact, efficient, warning tool for future situations—emotions. Without the emotions acting as a play-by-play bug-in-your-ear, you’d be walking through the bush constantly having to cue yourself: “Don’t forget the tigers. Don’t forget the tigers. Don’t forget the tigers.” You’d be so distracted by reciting this survival mantra that you’d walk right past the berries and starve to death anyway. So...you should listen to your emotions, they will tell you something useful.

However, these emotion/memory things can also prove to be a double-edged sword. Suppose that you’re out picking berries and a dark cloud comes over. The sunlight dims as if it were dusk. You’re likely to experience fear and have an impulse to go home (The tigers are coming!). If the fear is really strong, you may panic and run home, dumping your basket of berries on the ground. Ten minutes later, you arrive back at camp panting and out of breath. Then the cloud

blows over, the sun comes out, and you realize that you’ve just irrationally wasted a good opportunity to gather food. (Not to mention the further frustration of seeing your mate with hands on hips and that *you-dropped-the-berries-again-you-idiot* look in her eyes).

What this example shows is that emotions can be very sensitive, but they are not necessarily very specific. In other words, emotions are designed to be easily, and indiscriminately, triggered. It is, from an evolutionary perspective, more advantageous to worry when you didn’t need to, as opposed to under-worrying and ignoring a fatal threat. Better to be safe than sorry. This was of key value to our ancestors in their survival. Emotions were hardwired into their brains to trigger automatic self-protecting responses. You didn’t have to think before you took defensive action. Your brain could unconsciously monitor the light conditions for you so that you could focus on picking berries.

Because emotions are not very specific, several events can trigger the same strong emotion, even if the emotion isn't actually relevant to some of the events. (Eg., a passing patch of cloud covering the noon-day sun is not the same thing as nightfall. The tigers are still sleeping.)

So what is the adaptive thing to do with a strong emotion that could either be helpful, or incredibly misleading? The adaptive thing to do is to be curious about the emotion, feel it, massage it, understand it, see what triggered it, and then, only then, evaluate it. If you have the unfortunate tendency to ignore warning emotions, and it is nightfall, then you'll stay out too late picking food, only to be eaten yourself. If you tend to be over-sensitive to, or overwhelmed by emotions, then you'll run away from your food source with every passing cloud. You'll starve to death.

The healthiest, most adaptive, individual will feel fear at nightfall and go home. The same individual will be explicitly aware of fear during the daytime as a

cloud passes over, deduce that the emotion is not relevant, and then decide to stay on and continue picking. Which kind of person do you tend to be?: 1) a berry picker to the death, 2) a starving runner or 3) a self-aware individual who has all of the same emotions as the previous two, but who is able to evaluate the relevance of each emotion, and then make the right choice, instead of impulsively reacting to your emotional hardwiring. If you are a highly successful leader, you probably answered number 3). Most of us are somewhat too far along the continuum towards either number 1) or number 2). The good news is that most anyone can consciously and explicitly move themselves towards a number 3).

### ***The Value of Using Emotional Intelligence (EI) at Work on a Day-to-Day Basis***

So, what is the value of using EI on a day-to-day basis? At an unconscious level, through our emotions, we rapidly process the collective wisdom of our life's experiences in order to inform our decisions about the future. Without

emotions, this process would be slow, tedious and laborious. There would be no shorthand summary of our experiences. Instead, we would have to review all our major life events in detail to remind ourselves of the learning from each of them. Only then could we make a decision.

Imagine facing an important business decision and having to replay in your mind a videotape of everything you have done in your life *before* you make up your mind. Work would grind to a halt as everybody around the board table closed their eyes and lapsed into a semi-comatose state of self-review.

However, without knowing specific tools and techniques, emotions can be tricky to use and interpret. When used appropriately, emotions can propel an individual to stellar performance. When ignored, or used unquestioningly, emotions can derail even the most talented individual in a matter of seconds.

Why is this? Well, it’s because the very thing that makes emotions one’s ace-in-the-hole also makes them your fatal flaw. Emotions are a highly condensed form of memory. They convey a great deal of important information in a very short period of time. The downfall of this is that an emotion can often be giving you the *wrong* information for a given context. Remember, emotions are sensitive, but not specific. With our Neanderthal man, darkness appropriately triggers a fear of tigers, but in order to rather be safe than sorry, *any* kind of darkness, such as a cloud, can trigger a fear of tigers.

A colleague of mine hired a new employee who was considered to be very talented. At the first team meeting, she presented an excellent set of ideas to help the team target a potential new customer. However, her ideas quickly fell on deaf ears because of the way she interacted with the team. She was aggressive. She was defensive. She picked a fight with anybody who offered even constructive criticism of her ideas. As her first few weeks in the company unfolded, the

aggressive style worsened. Nobody, including her, seemed to understand what was going on...until finally one day, she had an insight. My colleague, the team leader, bore a physical resemblance to her aggressive ex-husband. Her emotions were appropriately feeding her all kinds of warning signals. She appropriately defended herself from a perceived threat that had maliciously attacked her in the past. Her emotions were desperately trying to help her. The only problem is that she ended up defending herself, and even attacking, someone that *looked* like her ex-husband. She erroneously attacked a member of her own team! She dropped her berries and ran because a fluffy white cloud blocked out some of the sun. She lacked emotional self-awareness. She did not have the tools to be constantly aware of her emotions. She was controlled by emotional baggage and this little escapade over several weeks took so much creative energy away from the team that the new client was lost.

If you are not consciously and explicitly aware of your emotions at all times, they

can do you, and your organization, harm. A lack of emotional intelligence can deeply cut into profit-making activities not only for yourself, but for those around you.

### ***Emotions and Goal-Directed Behaviour***

Leaders have always wanted their employees to realize their fullest potential. Leaders have always wanted their employees to give their “all” to the organization. In the past, leaders helped employees realize their potential through simple education and training. The presumption is that if you give the employee the knowledge that they need in order to carry out a specific set of tasks, then they will be much more likely to get their work done in an efficient and effective manner. In the past, this approach has worked. It is relatively easy to teach an individual a set of mechanical or intellectual skills, such as how to operate a machine, how to run a computer, or how to organize a work team. These skills certainly help the organization to be profitable. However,

things have changed and the set of skills that leaders must teach their employees has moved beyond just teaching efficient task completion. Leaders must now teach emotional skills to their employees. Why is this?

The new economy is about constantly going to new places. In the old economy, the company would have a new major destination every decade. Now, profitable companies need to be able to set a new destination many times within a decade. This requires incredible amounts of change for all members of the company. Changing destinations on a frequent basis means that employees have to be able to not only be comfortable with change, but to embrace change. If you lined up 100 people in your organization, especially on the front lines, what percentage of them would be completely comfortable with change? 10%? 40%?, certainly not 80 or 90%. In fact, if you asked those 100 people what they think about regular significant change, you would probably discover a deep resistance to change, even if you are absolutely convinced that the

change would be fundamentally good for each employee and the company as a whole. Why is that?

It is because change is fundamentally, an emotional process. Goals are set intellectually, with the profit of the organization in mind. However, asking people to change what they do because it makes intellectual sense is simply not a good enough reason to get them to actually change. Why?

To a Neanderthal, anything new or unfamiliar is presumed dangerous, until proven otherwise. Unfortunately, this still works for the majority of us today. If we do something really new, especially if it is really important to us, it will be, by definition, very uncomfortable. The Neanderthal part of your brain will be sending you warning emotions as if you were stupid enough to go berry-picking in the dead of night. You may have just decided, after deep rational thought, that it's perfectly safe to get 20 people to carry torches, scare the tigers, and get a big stash of fresh berries before the bears get to them. This is a brilliant idea. You are

working with the rest of the tribe to overcome the tiger obstacle. You’ve decided what is right and good to do, even though it’s never been done before. But your *Neanderthal* brain doesn’t care. It is going to feed you the mantra: “Night=tiger. Night=tiger. Night=tiger” until you try the new way a few times and you build up new feelings (shorthand emotional memories) that tell you that nighttime *torch* berry-picking is perfectly safe.

In short, the vast majority of us are doomed to coping with negative warning feelings every time we do something significantly new. This is because feelings are memories. Feelings are historical. Feelings are lag indicators, not lead indicators. It is very difficult to only have sustained good feelings about something that we’ve never done before. It is very difficult to *feel* safe with a situation until we have done it and we have experienced it to *be* safe. New emotional memories cannot be created until we have finished experiencing the new events themselves. In other words, if we’re going to use the

modern rational parts of our brains to dream up new things, to realize our potential, to go where we haven’t gone before, to *grow*, then we have to develop strategies to manage the negative emotions that our Neanderthal brains will inevitably feed us.

### ***What is the Antidote to “Change = Fear”?***

The way to overcome change resistance is to use a strong belief-in-self as a foundation from which to try new things and realize one’s fullest potential. The road to realizing maximum potential is first a road inward. If I want to reach my highest level of achievement, I need to be explicitly aware of everything that I do well. I want to know what I am successful at. Not only that, I want to know what brings me joy, because I’m more likely to have staying power if I am working towards goals that give me pleasure along the way. If I can shamelessly shout out loud what I love and what I am good at...well, then I can USE it.

If you are sure of what you’re good at. If you can trumpet your own successes, then you have set a foundation of belief in self. If you believe in yourself, then you believe in your abilities. But more importantly, if you believe in yourself, you believe in your potential to do things that you have never done before. You believe in your ability to take what you know, take your current skills, and then create something new...something valuable to yourself and the rest of the team. You are not afraid to stumble, because you know that you are a competent person. You are not afraid to make mistakes, because you know that you will learn from them, and do even better as a result.

There’s another part to the equation though. All of us also have weaknesses—blind spots—things that we struggle with. We know that our evolutionary tendency is to self-protect. Our response is to hide our weaknesses from others, and even to hide our weaknesses from ourselves.

Ostrich talk: “If we don’t look at our weaknesses, if we don’t name them, then they don’t exist.” If we avoid the

substance of our weaknesses, then we don’t have to feel *uncomfortable*. Who wants to feel uncomfortable anyway?

There is a cost to hiding though. It becomes like a bad habit. The hiding becomes generalized and we often end up hiding our strengths as well. When we avoid intimate knowledge of our weaknesses, we actually undermine our ability to use our strengths to overcome them. Even worse, when we hide our weaknesses from ourselves and others, we forfeit the opportunity to ask for help.

When you think about it, it’s sad. Here we are, bumping along, doing what we think is our best, but we can’t explicitly say what we’re good at. Society tells us not to. It’s called: “boasting”, “arrogance”, “self-centeredness”. Not only that, when we do get stuck, we don’t even ask for help. As a leader, you end up seeing a bunch of guarded people who are unwilling to take any risk. How profitable is that?

On the other hand, the person who uses high emotional intelligence is willing to become intimately familiar with what

they’re not good at. They become intimately aware of their strengths. They first work at creating belief in themselves. They use their positive emotions as a firm foundation from which to look for their weaknesses. In fact they are willing to shamelessly shout out loud what they’re *bad* at. They’re willing to scream for help, without having any feelings of guilt, shame or failure. The person who uses EI is energized by the possibility of realizing their full potential. Successful contribution becomes like sex...you want more of it. The person who uses EI won’t let some dumb little personal weakness distract them from achieving their potential. Areas of weakness are tremendously easy to fix. All you have to do is ask for help. You learn, through interaction with others, how to grow and overcome your weaknesses. You align yourself with others so that their skills complement yours, so that your blind spots are covered off through team interaction.

So what is the antidote to “change=fear”? The antidote is belief-in-self, which comes

from emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence does not remove the fear of change. In fact, it teaches you to *expect* fear with change. It gives you the ability to make a conscious decision to effortlessly let the fear wash over you, and then you can carry on with the new. With emotional intelligence you are finally freed up from your hardwiring. You will not be freed up from being fed intense warning emotions, but you will be freed up from the prehistoric hold that these emotions have had over you. When the paralyzing impact of “fear” is removed from the “change=fear” equation, then you are able to look at the change for its inherent value and the opportunity that it will bring. At this stage, change becomes exciting. A new equation is written “change=opportunity”. As a leader, which equation do you want your people to operate by?

This is why, as a leader, it is no longer sufficient to teach employees instrumental skills, such as mastering the latest technology. If you, as a leader, want to be profitable in the new economy, you

have to help your people learn to believe in themselves. You have to role model and teach a set of emotional skills that will allow people to get over their discomfort with newness. You have to role model and teach a set of emotional skills that will allow people to realize their fullest potential because they are ready and willing to use their strengths and ability to do things that they have never done before. In this way, you have built a team that is able to take your organization to each new destination that you set.