



Emotional intelligence – can we live without it?

By Cathy Lumsden

Do you want to be happy in your interpersonal relationships? Do you want to possibly change patterns which have been handed down from one generation to the next? Do you want your children to enjoy learning and have academic success? If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, then reading this article could change your life!

What is Emotional Intelligence?

One definition of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is “the capacity to get optimal results from your relationships with yourself and others.” (6 Seconds Emotional Intelligence Network.) It is the capacity to know your emotions, control your emotions, listen to others’ emotions and build effective relationships.

Emotional Intelligence is crucial, both in our personal and professional lives. Research has demonstrated that Emotional Intelligence can have a large impact on our communities, workplaces and homes.

It has been shown to decrease divorce rates as well as decrease overall medical costs. In our workplaces, it has contributed to increased profits for businesses and increased employee retention. The use of Emotional Intelligence has also been credited with increasing children’s social success and academic achievements. It appears that investigating the world of emotional intelligence is well worth the effort and can lead to positive results.

The five competencies of Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman, author and therapist, has categorized five different competencies of EI. They cluster into: 1) Self-Awareness, 2) Self-Regulation 3) Self-Motivation 4) Empathy and 5) Effective Relationships.

Self-Awareness is the cornerstone that supports the other EI competencies. The more we know about ourselves, the easier it is to control and choose what sorts of behaviours we’ll demonstrate at home and at work. When we lack self-awareness, our emotions can very easily hijack us, creating behaviours and situations that we definitely do not understand or appreciate. Self-awareness is directly connected to the second competency, self-regulation.

Self-regulation is the ability to choose how we want to handle our emotions and communicate them in constructive and consistent ways. For example, out-of-control anger is the leading cause of divorce. It can be either repressed anger or explosive anger, the results are the same – anger destroys love. When couples learn to respectfully and honestly express their emotions, without blaming or judging, their relationship becomes more solid and loving. Again, self-awareness is key as we need to be aware of what our emotional triggers are in our relationships and learn how to manage these reactions.

As mentioned previously, Emotional Intelligence can decrease medical costs. Numerous research studies are demonstrating how long-term stress and distress are linked to physical and medical illnesses. Gabor Mate, author of *When a Body Says No*, discusses various research studies that link emotional repression and lung cancer. The results demonstrated that smoking cigarettes does not always lead to lung cancer. However, the combination of smoking and emotional repression significantly elevates one’s chances of having lung cancer. Emotional repression potentiates the effects of smoke damage on the body. This is just one example

of how our minds and bodies co-exist. With increased self-awareness and self-regulation, individuals can learn to understand and manage emotions, potentially leading to a decrease in illnesses and medical costs.

Self-motivation is the third emotional intelligence competency. Once we are aware of our emotions and have learned “mood management,” the next step is to direct the power of our emotions towards a purpose which will motivate and inspire us. Self-motivated individuals persist toward goals, despite obstacles and set-backs. Optimism is also an important part of motivation. Dr. Martin Seligman, a well known psychologist and researcher, states that optimists are more motivated, more successful, have higher levels of achievement, plus significantly better physical and mental health.

Research studies in elementary and secondary schools are indicating that students who are better able to manage their emotions, are better able to focus and retain information. Consequently, they feel more successful and continue to stay motivated. This is not new information – Plato stated centuries ago “All learning has an emotional basis.” Schools that are incorporating EI competencies are finding academic achievements increasing, cooperation increasing and a decrease in bullying behaviours.

Empathy is the fourth EI competency. Once we have become more honest and intentional with our emotions, it is time to look outward. Learning to see things from another person’s perspective and responding appropriately is the basis of empathy. In Daniel Goleman’s book *Primal Leadership*, he describes empathetic leaders as very approachable, excellent at recognizing and meeting the need of colleagues, clients and customers. Leaders who lack empathy, self-awareness and self-regulation, are the main reasons talented people leave their work environments. Large corporations such as American Express are experiencing the financial benefits of EI and consequently are sending all of their financial advisors on EI training.

The fifth Emotional Intelligence competency, **Effective Relationships**, is about interacting with people successfully and being adept at bringing about higher levels of innovation and collaboration. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a well known expert on death and dying, narrows life lessons down to creating loving relationships with family and friends. At the end of the day, it is not about money, attractiveness or university degrees – it’s about effective intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

The business world is becoming more and more focused on effective interpersonal relationships. Research is demonstrating numerous benefits of EI environments. Forum Corporation Manufacturing and Services Companies (1989 – 1995) found that the reasons for losing customers and clients are 70% EI related. Four key attributes in building successful relationships both at work and at home are encouragement, respect, openness and listening. Unfortunately, these attributes are lacking in many corporations and companies and consequently both the company and employees suffer.

What if incorporating the emotional intelligence attributes created more of what you want, and less of what you don’t want? Better health, stronger leadership, healthier relationships. An offer you cannot refuse! When we live an emotionally intelligent life, we are not just alive, we feel alive!

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