

# The Case for Emotional Intelligence

**W**ould you like to be more effective in your work and in your personal life? Would you like to be able to better understand what you are feeling and why? Would you like to be able to participate more consciously in what you feel and how you respond, rather than just reacting in the same old patterns that you always have? Would you like to have more friends or be able to be closer and more open with the friends you have now? Would you like to be able to better monitor and motivate your progress toward your short- and long-term goals? Then you'll *Love* exploring the world of emotional intelligence!

Exploring and developing our emotional intelligence not only makes us happier, it makes us able to motivate ourselves, manage stress in our lives, and resolve conflict with others. It gives us the skills to be able to encourage, comfort, discipline, and confront different kinds of people appropriately in different situations. It determines how effectively we express our emotions within the cultural contexts of our family, our workplace, and our community. It determines how well people listen to us and how well we are heard.

## EMOTIONS: WHAT ARE THEY?

To effectively introduce the topic of emotional intelligence we need to start by talking a little bit about emotions and what they are. We like to say that emotions are about what we touch . . . not just what we touch with our fingers or our skin, what we touch with our eyes and ears, what we touch with our taste buds and the olfactory nerves in our noses. Emotions are how we feel about what we touch with our imagination, from the dread of a loud scary noise in the dark to those fifteen minutes of fame when you know you're at the top of your game and everyone else gets to see. Emotions are what move us and motivate us. All three of these words—*emotion*, *move*, and *motivate*—share the Latin root *emovare*, which means *to move*. Emotions are what sustain us through our struggles and crown us in our victories. In fact when you really think about why we do anything that we do, there is always a feeling involved—something that we are avoiding and moving away from or something that we want and are moving toward. Fear and desire are two of our strongest emotions and have long been considered the most powerful motivators in the animal kingdom.

Research at the National Institute of Mental Health by Candace Pert has shown that emotions are very closely associated with neuro-peptides, long chain protein molecules that circulate throughout the organs of the body and act like “messenger molecules,” conveying information about what is happening in one part of the body throughout the entire system. In her book, *Molecules of Emotion* (1997), Pert considers emotions to be a transformative link between mind and body, the mysterious quantum mechanical interface where information turns into matter and our bodies synthesize the chemicals of consciousness.

Recognizing that our feeling responses are grounded in our biochemistry is an important understanding. Emotional states such as anger, sorrow, depression, and joy can be influenced and even directed by us, but this does not mean they can be turned on and off like a light bulb. It takes our body time to metabolize these chemical components—such as the adrenaline that is released when we feel frightened. The chemistry of emotions can help us change our viewpoint and see the world through different attitudinal lenses depending on how we are feeling. When we create and maintain positive thoughts about ourselves and our world through our self-talk, we support positive emotional states such as resourcefulness, optimism, and motivation.

A good way to imagine emotions is as an invisible link that connects people with each other and to some extent with all living creatures—they constitute a field of specific information that we sense and decode using the ancient instinctual languages of facial expression, smell, body posture, and the whole realm of nonverbal language. On top of all that, human beings are able to add another layer of sophisticated interpretation. Through our use of cognitive intelligence and semantic language, we are able to label our feelings and give them a wide variety of symbolic meanings with subtle degrees of texture and nuance.

## Intelligence

Early in the 20th century psychologists began to devise tests for measuring cognitive ability and intellect in human beings. The eventual result was what we know today as the standardized IQ test. As research into human intelligence continued along these lines, it began to appear as if it was an inherited capacity and was not greatly influenced by any amount of educational effort. Adults did not necessarily have higher IQ scores than children, and over the course of their lifetime they didn't seem to develop more. The view that intelligence was what was measured by IQ tests and that it was controlled by genetics generally prevailed into the 1970s. Yet when Weschler developed the IQ measure, he stated that there are other forms of intelligence besides the IQ he addressed.

Other scientists agreed with Weschler and were not satisfied with a static, one-dimensional definition of intelligence or the way in which it was measured. In the 1980s Howard Gardner published research that validated his work on “multiple intelligences,” demonstrating the importance of expanding that definition, and Reuven Bar-On coined the term “emotional quotient” in an attempt to differentiate emotional competencies from intellect. Leading research by John Mayer and Peter Salovey was instrumental in developing a theory of emotional intelligence that consists of four domains: *perceiving emotions*, *facilitating thought*, *understanding emotions*, and *managing emotions*. They were joined in their efforts by David Caruso and together developed the MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test), a reliable, valid, ability-based assessment of emotional intelligence with a normative database of five thousand people.

Their definition of emotional intelligence emphasizes “intelligence” and differs significantly enough from others that we will include it here:

“‘Emotions’ refer to the feelings a person has in a relationship. For example, if a person has a good relationship with someone else, that individual is happy; if the person is threatened, he or she is afraid. Intelligence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to reason with or about something. For example, one reasons with language in the case of verbal intelligence, or reasons about how objects fit together in the case of spatial intelligence. In the case of emotional intelligence, one reasons with emotions, or emotions assist one’s thinking. That is, emotional intelligence, as measured by the MSCEIT™, refers to the capacity to reason with emotions and emotional signals, and to the capacity of emotion to enhance thought.” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2001, p. 2)

For more information on their description of intelligence within the concept of emotional intelligence, see the discussion of the “concept of an intelligence that processes and benefits from emotions” in Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000, p. 105).

The idea of having an ability-based emotional intelligence test with right and wrong answers may seem foreign to those who think emotions are too subjective to be quantified, but here is a simple explanation of how it works:

“Emotional skills can also be measured in an objective way through the use of ability, performance, or knowledge tests. Such tests would ask a series of questions like these:

- What is the cause of sadness?
- What is an effective strategy for calming an angry customer?

The MSCEIT™ (pronounced mess-keet) asks people to solve emotional problems, and the correctness of the answers is evaluated. In turn, a person’s scores are compared to a large, normative database to compute a sort of emotional intelligence quotient, or EI score.” (Caruso & Salovey, 2004, p. 75)

## The Brain

Processing emotion is a non-conscious event. It is something we do intuitively that allows us to anticipate others’ behaviors in a more direct, immediate fashion than language can. Emotional intelligence is all about immediacy. The cir-

cuitry in our brains is set up to process emotional responses without having to consider them rationally. How am I feeling right now? How are you feeling right now? How are our feelings affecting each other and the actions we are choosing to take in this moment? These are the kind of critical comparisons that the limbic system, or emotional brain, is making for us constantly, most of it below the threshold of conscious awareness.

When sensory input enters our brain, it first is processed in the thalamus, which scans information for familiar patterns that may have been especially significant to us in the past. Such patterns are then forwarded to the hippocampus, which further screens them for threatening content before the amygdala's final decision as to whether it should trigger the fight-or-flight response. If it turns out there is no precedent for fear, the information is then passed along to the neo-cortex, which is able to analyze it for meaning in a rational process.

The emotional circuits in the brain also regulate the balance of two critical hormones throughout the body, cortisol and DHEA. Cortisol plays many positive roles in bodily functions; however, it is often known as the "stress hormone" because stressful situations cause it to be secreted in excess, and then it can have very negative effects on many aspects of our health. DHEA, on the other hand, is sometimes known as the "anti-aging hormone" because it counteracts the negative effects of cortisol that tend to wear the body out and cause it to age.

## The Heart

But the brain is not alone in governing our emotional intelligence. In fact, recent research at the Institute of HeartMath (Childre & Martin, 1999) has revealed the heart to be a major player in the process of understanding and responding to our world. Our heart communicates chemically to the rest of our body by producing mood-enhancing hormones. Perhaps even more remarkably, the electromagnetic signal it sends to the brain (and every other cell as well) is the most powerful signal in the entire body! It produces an electromagnetic field that can be detected several feet away from the body in all directions. The heart also communicates mechanically with the rest of the body through pressure waves that are conducted through the vascular system. What is it sending in all these different channels of communication? It is giving the entire body feedback about how the whole system is functioning.

Research by Antonio Damasio (2003) has determined that human beings cannot make any cognitive decisions without also processing emotional information

that incorporates how we feel about the situation. It turns out that emotional intelligence is actually the synthesis of both heart and brain functions, weaving together thought and feeling into the marvelously rich fabric of human experience.

## EMOTIONS AND IDENTITY

Emotional intelligence also plays a critical role in conflict resolution. In their fundamental book, *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury (1981) characterize the process of resolving conflict as one of helping people move from “No” to “Yes.” What makes this difficult is that we tend to identify with our position, so in order for us to change it there has to be a change in our identity. In other words, if we think that we are the ones who deserve the promotion and the corner office because of our length and quality of service, we will have to change our sense of who we are and what those rewards mean to us symbolically in order to be able to accept another (equally good) solution. That change in identity may also come from the process of working through a deep disappointment and discovering that our competencies in flexibility and reality testing can truly help us transform.

Emotions play a critical role in identifying ourselves—in knowing who we are in the world and distinguishing “self” from “other.” In addition to governing the fight-or-flight process, the limbic system also manages our immune system. The critical task of the immune system is to be able to distinguish what is part of us and what is foreign. Even the process of understanding who we are once again turns out to be grounded in our biochemistry. Our cells have self-receptors that are “read” by immune cells to determine whether or not they are part of the self or invaders that pose a threat to the health, wholeness, and integrity of our system.

My very sense of “I-ness” comes from recognizing familiar sensory patterns in the environment and experiencing the same emotional responses that were originally generated throughout my body/mind and recorded in my memory. After enough memories have been stored (generally around age two), this sense of familiarity undergoes a profound transformation. The billions of bits of data crystallize and initiate the advent of self, the recognition that it is “I” who is having this experience—“I” who is hungry and wants to eat, “I” who feel safe, or threatened, or curious, “I” who is powerful and can make things happen in the world!

Over time, sophisticated menus of preference and aversion come to be developed through this same process of associational memory. “I” discover that

I know what I like and dislike and, depending on my level of confidence, am able to express that effectively to the people whom I depend on for survival. If I have lived in a cooperative environment, family, or culture that requires me to get the approval of others for my decisions and actions at every level, then my need for interdependence will tend to overshadow my need for independence. If I have lived in a competitive environment in which I am only able to satisfy my desires through continuously creating and asserting new behavioral strategies which satisfy but the letter of the law, my need for independence will tend to overshadow my need for interdependence.

My ability to remodel, update, and even upgrade my identity, to resolve problems and conflicts, and consequently my ability to move myself and others from “No” to “Yes” will be dependent on how consciously or unconsciously I process my emotions. If I am unconsciously embedded in the automatic sequence of stimulus-response conditioning, I will tend to be a creature of habit and be liable to perceive myself as a victim of the world. If, through self-reflective processes, I have been able to lengthen the amount of time between stimulus and response, in other words to make my self more conscious of the processes that determine my behavior, then I will be more flexible and tolerant, and have available to me a more robust repertoire of behaviors and be able to generate better decisions and more creative solutions to the problems I encounter in my daily life. This is perhaps the truest measure of our emotional intelligence.

## EMOTIONAL POWER

So as you begin the adventure of exploring new ways to develop your own emotional competence, as well as that of your clients, through the “workouts” in this book, we urge you to learn the distinctions and relationships among the fifteen skills defined in the Bar-On EQi®. They combine to provide a tremendously powerful lens through which human behavior and motivation can be seen and understood as never before. Significant examples of this can be found in the work of Geetu Orme (2001) where she exposes some of the popular myths about emotional intelligence and then develops the three strategic components that are critical for building quality in our relationships: tuning in, understanding, and taking action.

It is because our culture has conditioned us to perceive the world and measure the quality of life in terms of objective acquisition that we misunderstand our

interpersonal relationships and fail to value them appropriately. Consequently, we need all the help we can get in learning how to develop, enhance, and care for our connectedness in ways that counteract this fragmentation. Fortunately, the methods for developing emotional intelligence have arrived on the scene in the nick of time and begun to re-weave the fraying strands of postmodern civilization. Whether we avail ourselves of such healing or not, the world will continue to grow more and more complex, and the quality of our lives will be impacted more deeply on a daily basis by the feelings and decisions of people we have never met or even seen before.

In a way, we each live at our own center of the World Wide Web, and in order to make all the connections in our network as secure and beneficial as possible, we have to be very skillful in the way we generate and broadcast our emotional power—too much and people avoid us or set up defenses that block communication; too little and they take advantage of us or we never break through the barriers to intimacy or develop enough energy to achieve the very dreams that give our lives their meaning.