

THE KEY TO LANDING AND KEEPING A JOB FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES: SOFT SKILLS: EMOTIONAL MATURITY

As we discussed in our previous article concerning communication, soft skills often leave a bigger, more lasting impression than do hard skills. Remember, soft skills include such skills as communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, teamwork, etc. Taken as a whole, your set of soft skills will speak to your Emotional Maturity, more commonly referred to as Emotional Intelligence (EI); they will create an overall impression of who you are and how you handle yourself and others.

If you hope to land, and more importantly KEEP a job, you must work on developing your social skills and maintain an awareness of your emotions, your reactions to your emotions and how they may impact your success in the workplace.

This article will discuss the aspects of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and suggest ways in which you can strengthen its core competencies. It's important to note that Emotional Intelligence is separate and distinct from your IQ, which simply indicates your ability to learn. Your IQ in no way predicts Emotional Intelligence, and unlike your IQ, which remains stable throughout your lifetime, Emotional Intelligence can be honed and perfected with practice.

In order for this article and accompanying questionnaire to hold any sort of value, you must approach it with an open and honest mind. It is also helpful to bring a trusted friend or family member into the conversation to provide honest, but constructive guidance.

EMOTIONAL MATURITY: A LIFELONG JOURNEY

You may think this article doesn't apply to you, or perhaps you are reading it to help guide a friend or family member. Don't be so quick to dismiss its application in your own life. View Emotional Maturity/Intelligence not as a destination, but a direction in which you move throughout your life. No matter how mature we think we may be, the truth is, we all need to train ourselves to respond appropriately when faced with a difficult or overwhelming situation.

“A MATURE PERSON IS SOMEONE WHO HAS LEARNED FROM LOSSES, HAS GAINED WISDOM, AND POSSESSES A STRONG EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL STABILITY IN THE FACE OF LIFE’S DIFFICULTIES.” – JOHN C. MAXWELL

What is emotional intelligence? According to Travis Bradberry, co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, “Emotional Intelligence is the “other kind of smart.” It is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results.”

An article on mindtools.com further describes it as “an awareness of your actions and feelings and how they affect those around you. It also means that you value others, listen to their wants and needs, and are able to empathize or identify with them on many different levels.”

Bradberry has identified four core skills that make up an individual's Emotional Intelligence – Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. These core skills pair up under two primary competencies - Personal Competence and Social Competence.

THE CORE SKILLS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

PERSONAL COMPETENCE: How well do you remain aware of your emotions (Self-Awareness) and manage your behaviors and tendencies (Self-Management)?

- **SELF-AWARENESS:** Do you accurately perceive your emotions as they are coming on?
- **SELF-MANAGEMENT:** Are you able to harness your emotions and prevent them from overwhelming your rational thought? Do you have the ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and positively direct your behavior?

SOCIAL COMPETENCE: How well do you understand other people's moods, behavior, and motives (Social Awareness)? Do you use this understanding to improve the quality of your relationships (Relationship Management)?

- **SOCIAL AWARENESS:** Do you accurately pick up on and interpret the emotions in others?
- **RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT:** How well do you use awareness of your and other's emotions to successfully manage interactions and relationships?

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR EMOTIONAL MATURITY?

Of course there is a scientific explanation as to how Emotional Intelligence (EI) is developed, but we will stick with clear, easy to tackle strategies that you can start doing today! Improvement will be incremental and take time. Remember EI has everything to do with awareness and management. You must practice every day if you hope to understand and appropriately respond to your emotions.

1. PRACTICE OBSERVING YOUR EMOTIONS AND HOW THEY MAKE YOU FEEL

Particularly if you are in a heated or overwhelming situation, take a moment and take stock of your feelings. Are you feeling anxious, angry, weighed down, offended? Are you experiencing any physical sensations such as a pounding chest, overheating, a pit in your stomach? Perhaps your feelings may be more subtle. Either way, the more aware of these feelings you become, the more you will be able to manage them. The more you manage them, the calmer you will feel.

2. BECOME AWARE OF YOUR BEHAVIOR IN RESPONSE TO YOUR EMOTIONS

Pay attention to your behaviors related to specific emotions. Do your emotions impact your interactions with others? Do they affect your drive and productivity? Do they impact your overall sense of well being?

EXERCISE: Set a timer on your phone throughout the day. When the timer goes off, take a mental note on how you're feeling and how these feelings are presenting in your body. Note if these emotions are affecting your behavior and how?

3. LEARN HOW TO FEED AND ACT ON THE RIGHT EMOTIONS

We all experience both positive and negative emotions. It's impractical to think that we can eliminate every negative emotion. Don't try it; it will exhaust you. Instead, we need to feed our positive emotions. We need to act in a way that breeds positivity within us.

DO SOMETHING EVERY DAY THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO DO. THIS IS THE GOLDEN RULE FOR ACQUIRING THE HABIT OF DOING YOUR DUTY WITHOUT PAIN." – MARK TWAIN

We must resist the urge to feel our way into acting and instead act our way into feeling. We cannot use our emotions and feelings as an excuse to not do the thing that we should be doing. At the same time, we cannot use our feelings as an excuse to act in an inappropriate way. The next tip will help you in this process. Remember, practice makes perfect.

4. PRACTICE RESPONDING WITH CONSCIOUS THOUGHT RATHER THAN REACTING

Strong emotions often prevent us from thinking clearly. If we are not thinking clearly we will very likely not interact with others appropriately. We cannot use our emotions as an excuse to treat people poorly.

What is a **reaction**? Reacting is an unconscious process where we experience an emotional trigger, and behave in an unconscious way that expresses or relieves that emotion (for example, feeling irritated and snapping at the person who has just interrupted you). [Source: *7 Practical Ways to Improve Your Emotional Intelligence*]

What is a **response**? Responding is a conscious process that involves noticing how you feel, then *deciding* how you want to behave (for example, feeling irritated, explaining to the person how you feel, why this isn't a good time to be interrupting you, and when would be better). [Source: *7 Practical Ways to Improve Your Emotional Intelligence*]

TIP: Keep in mind that your brain is hardwired to react. It's the innate "fight or flight" mentality of the primitive brain. It's what our primitive ancestors used to survive. Reacting is instinctual. Responding is a conscious choice. The key is to stop, observe and reflect, even if it's just for a few seconds. Even a deep, measured breath can help you control an innate reaction. It's all about the pause.

"LIVE AS IF YOU WERE LIVING ALREADY FOR THE SECOND TIME AND AS IF YOU HAD ACTED THE FIRST TIME AS WRONGLY AS YOU ARE ABOUT TO ACT NOW!" – VIKTOR FRANKL

5. HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE FOR YOUR EMOTION-DRIVEN BEHAVIOR

You are not a puppet. Nobody is in control of your body, but you. You alone are responsible for how you react to the circumstances in your life. You cannot blame others for your actions – they don't come from anyone else – they come from you. Likewise, your feelings are yours alone. Nobody can make you feel a certain way, without you allowing them to.

Once you stop blaming others for how you feel and act, you will be able to take positive steps towards healthy behaviors and in turn healthy relationships.

6. PRACTICE EMPATHY

Not everyone is innately empathetic. While you may sympathize with others, empathy is different. Empathy is an ability to sense and feel the emotions of others. Empathy is a deeper understanding of emotions and their resulting behaviors.

Why is empathy so important? It's a pathway to acknowledging and understanding another's point of view. In turn, you will be able to more accurately predict the actions and reactions of people you interact with. Ultimately, you will be able to better handle people who may have conflicting points of view through a deeper understanding of their motivations.

You will be able to diffuse, rather than ignite emotionally charged reactions.

TIP: Practicing empathy is a daily process. First, you must listen intently. This is the only way you will come to fully understand the motivation behind what is being said. Second, call a truce with your "philosophical enemies." We all have people in our lives with whom we disagree no matter what. Identify those people and work on imagining the situation from their point of view. Acknowledge that there is not only one way of looking at things. Have a conversation, not an argument. Listen...reflect...respond...repeat.

"ALL OF OUR HABITS ARE ACQUIRED. WE'RE NOT BORN WITH ANY OF THEM. WE LEARN THEM, JUST AS WE LEARN OUR ATTITUDES. THEY DEVELOP OVER TIME AND ARE REINFORCED THROUGH REPETITION." – HAL URBAN

CONCLUSION

Developing emotional maturity is a lifelong process. Remember, it is not a destination, but a direction. We cannot expect to fully comprehend our emotions and reactions unless we make an ongoing effort to do so throughout our entire lives. We must always be mindful of how we feel and how those feelings and resulting reactions affect those around us. At the same time, we must come to understand and respect the feelings of others as well.

Emotionally mature people are not only better leaders, but better followers as well. EI will help us determine when we can lead and when we might learn something by following.

AUTHOR

New Horizons Un-Limited
811 East Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 937
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414.299.0124
new-horizons.org
horizons@new-horizons.org

EMOTIONAL MATURITY QUESTIONNAIRE – PAGE 1 OF 2

This questionnaire is designed to encourage reflection on your emotional maturity and will help you identify areas of strength and those in need of improvement. Answer the questions according to how you would react, not how you think you should react.

When you are finished, ask a trusted friend or family member to objectively answer the same questions concerning YOUR reactions. This will provide a clear picture of how you view yourself vs. how you come across to others.

“Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people.”

-Spencer Johnson

Question	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Are you able to recognize and specify your emotions when they come on?					
Are you able to evaluate the appropriateness of your emotional response against the event that caused it?					
Are you able to recognize when your emotions have taken over your rational thought?					
Do you allow your emotions to consume you? (Do your emotions curb your productivity?)					
Do you remain aware of your behaviors when feeling emotional?					
Are you able to control your nonverbal communication when feeling emotional (eg. glaring, hand gestures, pacing, finger pointing, etc.)					
Are you reactionary? (Do you act before thinking?)					
When in a heated argument, are you able to remain calm?					
Can you walk away from an argument without feeling overwhelmed by anger?					

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE QUESTIONNAIRE – PAGE 2 OF 2

Question	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do you listen? Really listen?					
During an argument, do you attempt to understand the other's point of view?					
Do you empathize with others? (Do you have an understanding of their feelings and emotions?)					
Do you think about the consequences of your words and actions on others?					
Do you take other's feelings into account before speaking or acting?					
Do you make an effort to pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues from others?					
Do you recognize when you have reacted in an inappropriate way?					
Do you hold yourself accountable for your actions?					
Can you apologize after acknowledging a wrongdoing?					
Do you graciously accept others' apologies?					
Can you handle disappointment without becoming critical of yourself or others?					
Can you let go of anger towards a situation or a person?					
Are you able to accept constructive feedback without becoming defensive?					
Are you able to accept constructive feedback without becoming self deprecating?					