



Being Smart About Emotions

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Gut Feel, Smart Decision

The facts point in one direction. They are unassailable. The numbers add up. Yet, you have a bad feeling about the direction and the decision, although you can't quite pin down a good, logical reason for it. What do you do? Ignore the bad feeling and choose the rational, logical path? That's what we are trained to do: after all, we are professionals and we get paid to think and not to feel. But, have you ever said 'yes' based on the pure facts when your gut screamed 'no', only to find out that your instinct proved to be right? Perhaps it was a hiring decision where the credentials of the candidate were so impressive and as a result you chose to ignore the "bad feelings" you experienced during the screening process only to discover your reservations about your new hire to be confirmed weeks later. Certainly, acting on impulse, without the benefit of thought, can likewise lead to disastrous results. The blending of thinking with the data of feelings combines all available sources of data to optimally decide and to take effective action. Recognizing and subsequently acting on those feelings you experienced during the hiring process could have led you to ask further questions to explore during the interview with the candidate.

Emotional Intelligence

This adaptive blending of feeling with thinking is what is called *emotional intelligence*. Emotional intelligence is based on three, fundamental principles:

- emotions contain data;
- emotions can help you think; and,
- feelings are not always smart.

Emotions Contain Data. Have you ever been driving down a familiar road, almost on automatic pilot, not really paying much attention to the road ahead when the blast of a truck horn jolts you into awareness that you are inadvertently crossing the double yellow line? What is that emotion? Probably that of *surprise*. This emotion comes on suddenly, it automatically changes what you are paying attention to, your eyes dilate to take the scene in, and you are ready for quick action. Then, the emotion subsides and you continue safely on your journey. All emotions, like surprise, occur due to some sort of change in the environment around you, and therefore, are a valuable source of information or data about what is going on in you and other people and the world. To ignore the data of emotions can be a risky business.

Emotions Help You Think. How you feel influences what you think about and how you think. And if you can generate just the right feeling to match the task you are engaged in then you'll have a better result. Not quite convinced? Well, would you ask your boss for a raise if he or she was in a really bad mood? Why not? Here's another example to consider: does it matter what mood your team is in to generate lots of creative, new ideas? There is considerable scientific research that supports the notion that feelings and thought are deeply linked. Knowing these rules, and being able to generate the right mood at the right time is both difficult and intelligent.

Feelings Are Not Always Smart. We have had days when we – or maybe a friend – wakes up on the wrong side of the bed, and this negative mood filters the experience of the morning. Feelings arise for several reasons: they can be the result of an emotion-causing event, and so, need to be attended to. Or, feelings can be the result of a mood which has no identifiable cause and is not a signal or data about the

world. So being emotionally intelligent also means that you separate the noise of moods from the signal of emotional data.

You probably have heard of emotional intelligence because you read, or heard of, a best-selling book by that title published in 1995. (Since then, the book's author, Daniel Goleman, has published two other books and several articles on EI). What you may not realize is that the EI concept was first developed by two academic psychologists – Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer - in 1990. EI has come to mean many different things since it entered the vocabulary of pop-culture, and unfortunately, it is often equated with anything that is not IQ. That's why you see so many programs that years ago would be called competency modeling, communication skills or conflict resolution workshops labeled as emotional intelligence seminars, or usually, an EQ course. But there is real science behind the pop term, just as there is a real intelligence behind emotions. Let's turn our attention to this unique and practical approach to emotional intelligence.

The original, intelligence-based model of EI consists of four, related abilities:

- *Identify* emotions accurately.
- *Use* emotions to help you think.
- *Understand* emotions and their causes.
- *Manage* emotions to make optimal decisions.

The first part of EI is the ability to accurately identify emotions in yourself, in others, and the environment around you. Next comes the ability to generate and then use emotions to help you think and reason. Third is the ability to understand the causes of emotions and how they change over time as different events unfold. Finally, the fourth ability allows you to stay open to the underlying data of emotions and go with or set aside the feelings in order to take optimal action.

Emotional Blueprint

We have taken these four interrelated abilities and put them together to create what we call an *Emotional Blueprint*. The *Emotional Blueprint* is a four-step problem-solving process that can be applied to almost any important interaction, decision or situation. Let's go back to the bad-mood boss for an example:

- You first identify that your boss is in a negative mood (Identify Emotions).
- You realize that as a result, he is very unlikely to be open to a discussion of your raise (Use Emotions).
- You understand that he is in a bad mood, and wisely attribute it to his overall pattern of ups and downs (Understand Emotions).
- You manage your emotions by taking the frustration and leverage its power to polish your pitch for the next day (Manage Emotions).

That's a simple example, but let's make it more complex, and perhaps, more satisfying. In this case, you identify your boss's mood, but also identify your strong need to have that discussion. Feeling *interested*, you generate a few good ideas to try out. But you also generate a feeling that is similar to the one your boss is experiencing in order to better figure out his perspective. This is a great move on your part because it helps you to understand that your boss will go nuts if you walk in and ask for that well-deserved raise. So you generate several emotional what-if analyses, predicting his reaction to various alternative actions. You decide on a course of action, and engage your boss in a conversation designed to manage his mood so that he 'snaps out of it' and is better able to understand your point of view and to feel for you. At the same time, you monitor your emotions in order to be prepared for changes in your boss, in you or in the environment around you.

Measuring EI

These are examples of emotional intelligence abilities that are strong and well-developed. Not everyone is as gifted in this arena. But the biggest challenge in EI is not that someone is lower in EI than others, but that we usually don't know it. That's because people in general are really bad at estimating their skills, intelligence and especially, their level of emotional intelligence. If we can't estimate our EI skills, then what about other people, through the use of, for instance, a 360? While 360's are extremely popular and useful, we also know that they are poor predictors of a person's emotional intelligence. (Could you imagine using a 360 or self assessment tool to measure IQ as part of a hiring or leadership assessment process?) However, emotional intelligence can be measured objectively just as IQ is measured. Rather than ask you whether you are good at, say identifying emotions, or asking others whether you identify emotions, an EI ability test shows you a picture of a person feeling a certain way, and then asks you to guess how that person is feeling.

IQ Test for Emotions. The major ability test of EI is called the MSCEIT, which stands for the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. It takes about 30 minutes to complete and is predictive of a variety of important outcomes at work and life. However, this measure of EI, and EI generally speaking, is but one of *many* important components in our success. We still need plain old-fashioned IQ, technical skills, and many other traits to be successful in various roles in life.

Teaching EI

Learning Emotional Skills. One of the fundamental pop-culture beliefs about EI is that EI is learned whereas IQ is fixed. As far as we can determine, there simply is not a good answer to the question of whether EI can be increased or not. At the same time, the skills of EI, like any skills, can be acquired. A person who is not good at identifying emotions can be taught which facial expressions indicate which emotions. Someone who lacks a solid emotional understanding can acquire a more sophisticated emotional vocabulary.

Teaching the Smart Way. Effective training of EI takes a multi-method approach, and needs to include experiential components along with intellectual components. Practice in your own environment is essential to being able to take your newly-defined skills and apply them to your own, unique situations. One bit of good news regarding the teaching of EI is that group training is both effective and cost-effective. The reason is that most human emotions have a strong interpersonal component to them. Practicing in a group, therefore, gives you the cues you'll need to learn emotional abilities.

These Are Hard Skills. Training and development is not optional when it has to do with compliance-related issues or critical technical skills. When the accounting software is updated, the accounting department is trained on the in's and out's of the new system. When a government body issues major changes to industry regulations, compliance training is not an option. Soft skill training is a different story: it is dependent upon discretionary budget dollars. However, when we define, measure and train EI as an intelligence, it becomes hard skill training, with hard metrics, hard training and hard outcomes. EI is not an option: it provides you with the data that you need to survive and ultimately thrive in any environment.

Being Smart About Emotions

All good decisions, and all effective actions, are the result of thinking and feeling. Emotional intelligence is all about leveraging the data of emotions. Emotional intelligence can be defined as an intelligence, it can be objectively measured, and its skills can be taught.

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