

On Emotional Intelligence

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The following discussion is taken from my book “Survival Guide for Disastrous Times.” Numerous world-class athletes were interviewed and the inspirational highlights of their lives are woven into a guide to help you accomplish great things. Various individuals were speaking about Mike Tyson being a very intelligent man, even though his professional career has been a disaster. In fact, those professional boxers and other athletes who knew Mike were rather fond of him. They were sorry that his career got off track. The Mike Tyson story is another matter. However, my thoughts on “emotional intelligence” germinated from that discussion.

Most people probably do not know that Mike Tyson is an intelligent man. When many people think of Mike Tyson they probably have images of him in prison or biting off an ear. These images do not inspire a vision of a man who is thoughtful and insightful. The impression is more of a raging bull out of control.

There is a big difference between intellectual intelligence and emotional intelligence. One can actually be mentally gifted, but have such a low emotional intelligence that they do some pretty stupid things. Emotional intelligence is composed of several factors: the awareness of one's feelings, the ability to express one's feelings, contain one's feelings, organize one's feelings, resolve one's feelings and the capacity for empathy. It is possible to be intellectually smart but emotionally retarded. Just because you have a good mind, does not mean you have done any work on your emotional self. Emotional intelligence is something that can be developed and learned. If we left children alone and did not socialize them, we would have a bunch of wild kids running around without inner controls.

The Awareness of one's feelings: Have you ever asked someone close to you how he/she feels about something and the response is, “I don't know.” The first step in emotional intelligence is knowing what you feel. Without the knowledge of what and how you feel, you are lost. You will act and react based upon unconscious forces without any power for self-direction. You will become the victim of life's circumstances and can be manipulated by anyone smart enough to know how to get you all worked up and play upon your emotions. According to those who knew Tyson, this is what happened when Don King began to manage him. King got Tyson all emotional upset over racial issues and Tyson began to lose is good sense.

The ability to Express one's feelings: Knowing what you feel is the beginning, but to be really emotionally smart, you need to know how to express those feelings. The expression of feelings allows people to develop intimacy and solve conflicts. It is impossible for someone to relate to you over time if they do not know how you feel. Many people act as if they expect other people to read their minds/emotions. It is not other people's responsibility to read your mind, that is left for psychics and they usually get paid for the service. If you want to be emotionally healthy, you need to express your feelings so they do not remain stuck in your gut, especially the ones like anger, fear, and resentment. You can make yourself physically sick if you do not know how to emotionally process your emotions.

The ability to Contain one's feelings: Sometimes we have some pretty strong feelings: like wanting to bite someone's ear off. However, an emotionally mature individual does not act on every impulse that arises. Just because you feel something, does not make it appropriate to express. If everyone went around expressing all their emotions we would have a very chaotic society. Just as, if no one ever expressed how he or she felt, we would have a very repressed society. There is a balance. That is why we call it emotional intelligence because you have to learn how to be smart about when to express what you feel. Sometimes when you have very strong feelings, whether they are very powerful loving ones or angry ones, you need to hold on to them and allow yourself to understand what is going on. Giving full vent in the heat of the moment is not always the best choice. We see this loss of control in every aspect of life, sports, marriage, and international relations. We see individuals and groups engaged in riots, fights, brawls, war, and murder. There are good examples of pretty stupid levels of emotional intelligence.

The ability to Organize one's feelings: In highly complicated situations and are charged with intense emotions, like competition in professional sports, it is common to have multiple conflicting and perhaps confusing feelings. In the final holes of a major golf tournament you are in the lead by two strokes. Two top players are making a charge right behind you. This is your first chance to win a major tournament. Your mind is beginning to race, what if I win? My whole life is going to be great! What if I lose? I don't want to blow it! Should I lay up or go for the green in two? What will people think if I lay up?

When you have lots of feelings and lots of choices, life becomes very interesting. It also becomes very confusing. Another aspect of emotional intelligence is being able to process all those feelings and put them into their proper place. Some thoughts and feelings need to be given high priority and addressed, others need to be ignored. It takes a well-integrated personality to process all these thoughts and feelings and come up with the best course of action. Great results don't happen by accident. Individuals who have internal psychological structural problems do not stay in the winner's circle. Their inability to manage complex situations will take them out.

The ability to Resolve one's feelings: Emotional Intelligence requires an inner life that is free from long-standing emotional conflicts. If you are holding on to the old hurts, fears and/or resentments, then you are not capable of living fully in the present. It takes a lot of psychic energy to live fully in the present: to live each moment. If your energy is caught in the past, over old issues, then you are less able to fully engage life as it is. Resolving old unfinished "business" is a must for anyone who wants to live a happy and peaceful life. It is impossible to perform at your best if you are stewing over past or future events.

The zone, in any sport, is a place where things seem to happen without effort. There is a sense of joy that comes from the Zone. Players do not access this magical place when their minds and emotions are in turmoil. Inner peace and clarity allows one to focus and get their mind out of the way so they can play their best.

The capacity for empathy: Emotional Intelligence does not exist in a vacuum. Your emotional intelligence is somewhat determined by your ability to related to others. You cannot have a cold heart, be selfish and have a self-centered attitude and be emotionally mature; something will be missing: a loving connection with others. A successful life is somewhat determined by the love you share. Empathy is your capacity to emotionally tune into others and feel what they are feeling. Empathy is a psychological function that allows for human connection and understanding. Most of our greatest athletes have demonstrated a sincere desire to help others. For example, Tiger Woods is helping kids with the First Tee and his Learning Center. The list goes on and on. To be a true champion requires that you care for more than just your own success.

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