

Raising Your EQ, Not Your IQ

Peggy Walton, Ph.D.

You're talking with a close friend and you're trying to "read" her. How do you know if what you are assuming about her words and body language is accurate? Or, a coworker in a volunteer agency "starts in on you," blaming you for the low registration rate for an annual event. In a business setting, do you hesitate to raise your rates? Do you feel queasy "clinching a deal?" "Emotional intelligence" is a current buzzword phrase describing attributes that we share to varying degrees, and use with varying degrees of success in our interactions with others – at work and at home. Our emotional reactions in anxiety-producing situations such as those above – those in which we feel threatened at some level for whatever reason – are our default positions that develop early in life, according to Jan Johnson, the creator of the "EQ in Action Profile."

Early in our relationship with our primary caregivers (usually, but not always, our mothers), we learn to recognize and deal with our emotions in constructive and destructive ways, and these experiences are etched in the neural pathways in our brain, particularly in its limbic area. In The General Theory of Love, Thomas Lewis and his colleagues write:

“the ... purpose of the limbic brain was to monitor the external world and the internal bodily environment, and to orchestrate their congruence...The limbic brain stands at the convergence of these two information streams; it coordinates them and fine-tunes physiology to prime the body for the outside world...”

We rely on these pathways, however appropriate or inappropriate, as we interact with others, building and maintaining relationships in our face-to-face, moment-to-moment, interactions with others.

Based on emerging research in neurophysiology and in human development attachment theory, Johnson's model rests on 5 constructs:

- your orientation to your self and to another person
- your orientation to a positive or negative approach to life
- your empathy accuracy in "reading" others
- your empathy compassion, and
- your access to an array of feelings.

This research also indicates that EQ is a set of skills that can be learned through deliberate practice.

If you find yourself feeling victimized when the new bathroom sink and cabinet don't look the way you expected them to look, or if you find yourself blaming others for a deadline that you missed, you might want to focus on developing your orientation to yourself. People with a balanced self/other orientation "...can turn inside and be aware of their experience in the midst of a difficult situation AND they can easily and quickly turn to the other and focus on the other...holding the space for both... (they) are able to be aware of their own experience in difficult situations and also stay connected to others," according to Johnson. A strategy that might help you make this switch is to become aware of when you feel as if you are a victim. Johnson continues: "What is the relationship? What is the pattern? Who are you giving power to? How can you interrupt this pattern and make another choice that reduces your dependence on the other?"

If you found that you were acting on a premise that turned out to be unfounded – an assumption that you were unintentionally making about your client or about your significant other, then learning to ask about the experience of others, learning to be curious about their experiences, might be helpful in clarifying and assuring your understanding. A strategy to try might be to listen to people without interrupting them,

without changing the subject, without talking about yourself, or without giving advice.

If people around you tell you that you are too quick to act, that you know what you want and go after it *before* others are aware of what *they* want – and, in the process alienate them, or make what turns out to be poor decisions, then perhaps developing a balance between your thoughts, wants and feelings is in order. A practice that might help is to track your own feelings and thoughts, and inquire about their impact on others. Write a description of these situations and their effect in a journal, and reflect on any changes that you notice as a result of these observations, suggests Johnson.

Finally, if you find yourself ignoring the tailspin in the “vital signs” of your business, or in your personal relationship, then perhaps the “Pollyanna” approach to business and relationships is not working for you. Failure to acknowledge these signs can lead to perilous positions at work and at home. Are you acting out of fear? Out of naiveté? Are you prone to “keeping your head in the sand?” Consciously listening to your own experience, and allowing it to surface in your mind is a start to accepting uncertainty. Or, become conscious of your breathing; practice breathing slowly so that you acknowledge your feelings and emotions in crucial situations in your life.

Remember the adage: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten.” Break out of your “business as usual” patterns, try one of these practices, and see what happens in your business and in your personal life!

Bibliography

Johnson, J. EQ Fitness Handbook: 150 Practices for Daily Living. Learning in Action Technologies, 2003.

----- EQ in Action Profile: A Profile of You in Relationship. Learning in Action Technologies, 2005.

Lewis, T., Amini, F., and Lannon, R. A General Theory of Love. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

Siegel, D. The Developing Mind: How the Brain and Relationships Interact to Shape Who We Are. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999.

Biography

Peggy Walton is certified as a life coach by the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, and as a user of the “EQ in Action Profile.” Her coaching practice centers on women in transition and women in the “sandwich generation,” parents of disabled children, and educators seeking renewal and reengagement. Dr. Walton is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Ukraine 1994-9996), a lifelong learner who returned to graduate school to earn her doctoral degree in experiential learning, and again to train as a life coach. She lives by the motto: “Learning is change, and the less involved we are, the less change is possible” by Edward Cell. Contact her at: www.cplifecoaching.com