



Do Our Emotions Matter?

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Emotions are an extremely powerful resource and may be the most powerful resource we have. Emotions keep us alive, warn us of danger, tell us to flee, help us guard our loved ones, allow us to love and to have hope, give us our relationship to the world and our unique personality and in fact defines the world for us. Emotions affect our very health, our passion and joy for life, our motivation, and helps direct what our actions will be. Emotions influence our values and our thoughts, and helps define both our relationships and our reactions to the world. Without emotions there would be very little learning and our long term memory would be limited.

Without emotions, life would have no meaning, but be a series of factual events. Both birth and death would merely be another occurrence rather than a joyous or saddening event. Without emotions, there would be no bonding with children or anyone else for that matter. Emotions are essential to our lives and may be the very essence of our lives. Maybe we are not human beings having an emotional experience, but emotional beings having a spiritual and intellectual experience. **Emotions make us who we are and are the essence of our experience.**

Emotions are central to our lives. We were emotional beings before we were thinking beings. As children, our emotional response was primarily how we related to the world, our thinking and cognitive capabilities came later. Even as adults there is much research now that says our emotional brain receives and interprets information before our thinking brain can process the information. That is a part of our survival. It seems odd that we often distance ourselves from our emotions yet they are essential for survival.

We have emotional relationships, not thinking relationships. We get close to or stay away from those individuals with which we have a strong emotional connection, not an intellectual connection. We may like the way an individual thinks, the way they process information, the way they solve problems, but that is not what bonds us to that individual. What bonds us is an emotional connection. IQ helps us in problem solving, but our emotions help us deal with others and ourselves. IQ helps give us our skills and competencies, while EI gives us our character and values.

In studying cases where people have had strokes, brain tumors removed or accidental brain damage, medical experts and neuroscientist have discovered that when the parts of our brains that enable us to feel our emotions are damaged or removed our IQ remains. We can still make



decision, analyze, and understand our environment. We can even score well on various IQ tests, however our ability to function in the world is greatly diminished. With no affect, our ability to interact with other people, to be sensitive to others, to empathize, to bond, to build a relationship is nonexistent. Most individuals who have experienced this type of brain damage cannot hold on to a job, even though they can reason perfectly.¹

Emotions affect us whether we are aware of them or not. We experience emotions before we experience thought, although over the years, we have conditioned ourselves not to be sensitive to the emotions and many of us no longer feel or are aware of the subtle emotions. Today, for many of us the emotion has to be intense before we become aware of it. The ability to experience emotions is as natural and probably as frequent as the ability to experience thought. Both are hardwired into our brains.

Joseph LaDoux, professor at New York University, found that messages from our senses are first received by our feeling brain before they go to our thinking brain. His conclusion was that our emotional intelligence actually contributes to our cognitive thought process.² Rather than get into the argument of which part of our brain is best, dominant, or the highest level of functioning, it is probably best to approach cognitive functioning and emotional intelligence as interrelated and synergistic resources. Without either one, we are less effective as humans and not as complete. Each one helps the other and both are necessary. Emotional Intelligence brings our inner world into focus while IQ brings understanding to our outer world.

Dr. Segal writes, "EQ illumines our inner world. People who are emotionally intelligent know the difference between what is important to them and what is important to someone else; they also know the difference between what they need to survive and a passing whim. Most important, they can weather life's thousands of setbacks. They have a sense of proportion that the brainiest among us often lose at a young age."³

Thinking can and often does interfere with emotions (we think in order not to feel) and emotions can and often do interfere with thinking (when we are highly emotional, it is hard to think clearly). At the same time, we can use our emotions to make better decisions and we can use our IQ to aid in our emotional expression. The goal of Emotional Intelligence is to learn how to use our emotions along with our cognitive processes (interdependent resources) to aid our thinking, decisions, and actions.

¹ Antonio Damasio, "Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain"

² Joseph LaDoux "The Emotional Brain"

³ Jeanne Segal "Raising your Emotional Intelligence"



Humans, it seems, have a basic instinct to avoid pain and seek pleasure. Why then would any individual want to feel their pain of emotions, to experience the pain of sorrow or despair or fear? It is no wonder that we move to quickly cut off painful feelings, to repress them, to stifle their expression or to think through them, which is often a rationalization or denial. For the same reason we try to prolong those emotions that bring us pleasure, joy, love, happiness, and laughter. In fact, sometimes we try to induce these pleasurable emotions artificially, drugs, alcohol, sex, sports, etc.

There is no doubt that we are emotional beings. Learning to become sensitive to our emotions and to identify them, gives us another source of valuable information about our environment not obtainable through intellect alone. With our IQ, we try to make sense of our world through analyzing the information. With our EI, the emotion **is** the message! Pay attention to it.

