

# Exploring Practical Perspectives of Emotional Intelligence



# Exploring Practical Perspectives of Emotional Intelligence:

*Harnessing the Power Within*

By

Lesley Gill

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Exploring Practical Perspectives of Emotional Intelligence:  
Harnessing the Power Within

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*This book is dedicated to my amazing children  
Amanda and Nathan, Peter and Rachel, and Elise and Chris,  
and all my darling grandchildren.  
You are a continual inspiration to me,  
and bring me so much love, pride and joy.*



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## PREFACE

Most of us appreciate we need resilience, empathy, kindness, mental toughness, determination, and many other emotion-related qualities that help us to be successful in life and achieve long-held ambitions and dreams. I have noticed that how we use our emotions makes a massive difference to our potential success. How we manage our emotions not only affects us but also the success or otherwise of our relationships.

A quote by Les Brown left an indelible mark on my life.<sup>1</sup> He said,

The graveyard is the richest place on earth, because it is here that you will find all the hopes and dreams that were never fulfilled, the books that were never written, the songs that were never sung, the inventions that were never shared, the cures that were never discovered, all because someone was too afraid to take that first step, keep with the problem, or determined to carry out their dream.

While this book has been a long time coming, it has (finally) happened. I knew this book needed to be written. The desire had been niggling inside me for a long time, unfulfilled. I needed to make time and allay the self-doubting voices and begin. I was spurred on by the belief that people needed to hear (or in this instance, read) what I had learnt—practical concepts and actions that intelligently and successfully harness and channel our emotions.

Sometimes we experience radical change. Other times, we embark on change in small steps. Either way, we are transformed. Little changes today make a big difference on the landscapes of our future.

Whether the decision to grow and change is our choice or forced on us through circumstance, our resolve to harness the power of the emotions within us means our ability to deal with change is easier, and the situation is less overwhelming.

Emotions carry significant internal energy or power, just waiting to be released. Think about the last ecstatic moment you experienced, and the euphoria you felt. It was energising and filled you with optimism. Now think about the last time you were really angry about something, even enraged,

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<sup>1</sup> Les Brown, “Quote,” January 20, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/884712-the-graveyard-is-the-richest-place-on-earth-because-it>.

notwithstanding whether appropriate or not. Your anger also expended intense energy. I laugh when I write this as I remember how vigorously I cleaned my house when I was angry. At least, when the anger subsided, the house was tidy!

Our emotional energy (or power within us) can be harnessed for good; to transform us, fuel our ambitions and dreams, and to help support us achieve the positive change we want in our world, indeed *the* world. I have always been interested in how our emotions and thinking interact to support our personal success.

This book demystifies the concepts of emotional intelligence (EI), interspersed with practical and relatable ideas and pointers to implement and cheer you on from the side-line through your personal journey. Each chapter presents an area related to our emotional strengths and frailties. Chapter One introduces the purpose of the book and how it is arranged. Chapter Two focuses on self-awareness, a key concept that is like a door we must enter to get the most out of the other chapters. Without developing our self-awareness, we will not be able to “see” what is going on in us, or what and how we might change. Ensuing chapters talk about resilience, rejection, grief and loss, empathy, spiritual wellbeing, and emotion management. The ideas and concepts have been “road-tested” and refined through my own life as well as the many personal development workshops I have run.

The book is written for those of us who want to grow through life’s successes and struggles but might not know where to start. Congratulations on starting your journey of harnessing the power within *you* to achieve the personal transformation you seek. I hope you enjoy the rollercoaster of challenges and highlights ahead.

# CHAPTER ONE

## EMOTIONS: FRONT AND CENTRE

Everyone is dealing with something, whether a single event or an accumulation of many. We are constantly drawing on our resources and reserves to navigate our way through these challenges.

All of life's experiences involve our thoughts, feelings, and actions. The scope of emotions we experience is enormous as is the depth, breadth, and height they reach or fall. Sometimes the experience and our emotional responses match appropriately, for example when we experience ecstatic joy when something goes extremely well, or despair as we experience the loss of someone or something special to us. Perhaps we have been taught to restrain ourselves from showing emotion, thus what is happening and what we are showing outwardly is mis-aligned with what we are feeling inwardly. Sometimes our emotional responses are entirely at odds with the situation, for example, when we get *really* angry at a minor issue—I can hear the words echoing “Yes, but you weren't there!” The great thing is that this example describes all of us at one time or other. Often, it is that last one small thing, even completely unrelated, that pushes us over the proverbial edge.

You did not get the job you were really hoping for, or a personal relationship you were invested in was not held in the same esteem by the other person who has walked away from it. Perhaps, when you arrived home from work you found your house had been burgled. Maybe, you had an argument with someone at work or in your family. Perhaps the bills are mounting up and your income does not match your outgoings. A family pet has died. You were made redundant (or someone you love was). The kids are at a certain stage of development that is challenging. Or your job is difficult at the moment. Perhaps you are a student facing seemingly endless classes and assessments. Or you may be juggling the needs of older parents. You have issues related to employment or unemployment. Maybe retirement is looming, or your health and well-being is compromised. The cat ate the salmon you put on the table for tea (actually, that really

happened). The kids are fighting. Someone is opposing you and you feel wronged.

Handling challenging situations reinforces the importance of successfully using emotional intelligence in our everyday lives. Managing the interrelationship between thinking, emotion and behaviour is paramount in harnessing the power within us to direct our energy effectively and manage our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical reserves.

Following outbreaks of COVID-19 around the world, on 24 March 2020 in New Zealand our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, announced that we were also caught up in “history in the making”, which has played out in each of our personal coronavirus stories. Our thoughts and emotions ebbed and flowed as the effect of a national lockdown impinged on life as we knew it. Even though we anticipated these events, the reality of it nonetheless had a huge impact as we worked through what it meant for us: job losses, isolation, loneliness, free time, grief and loss, family implications, and so on, indeed, wherever we were in the world.

My daughter’s baby was born a week into the COVID-19 Lockdown (Alert Level 4). I was not able to welcome this darling wee boy in person or hold him until Alert Levels moved to a lower level. I only saw him through photos. At Alert Level 3, I was able to drop off gifts at the front door and see him through my daughter’s lounge window. The photo of us on each side of the window is precious although it does not replace the squidgy cuddles I longed for with this wee newborn grandson.

Each of us have stories, many much more challenging than this one. Some happenings were supported by technology so that we could connect online if not in person. Some events we could not celebrate and memorialise at all. Perhaps a family member or friend died, and you could not visit them in hospital or attend their funeral. Weddings and other events were put on hold as life as we knew it ground to a halt. Businesses closed, some for good. Our only comfort lay in the hope that our compliance to lockdown meant that the likelihood of surviving the coronavirus increased along with the hope of reconnecting in the future. We all experienced a mix of emotions in light of the events and experiences we had to cancel or postpone. Courage and hope have been constant companions as we contemplate how these events re-design our futures. Experiences such as these, as well as just doing regular ‘life’ routines drain our mental and emotional resources. We tend to just keep pushing on without appreciating that all of these life events are “draining our tank”.

Some of us have been running on empty  
for a long time.

It is important to understanding the interplay between thought and emotion in using emotional intelligence, which is defined as the intelligent use of emotions and thinking in our decision-making processes.<sup>2</sup> If you have ever taken an exam you will know the importance of trying to collect all of your stored knowledge into one “place” and so be able to download all of the information you have learnt or memorised for the two hours or so of that exam. The problem I had with exams was the stress of the situation meant that as I walked into the exam room, all of the information I had studied said “*Goodbye!*” and so I was left sitting in the room, pen in hand, remembering little of what I had studied; stressed and defeated. Naturally, this experience had an accumulative effect on the next assessment situation as confidence and self-belief faded.

The adage “knowledge is power” only works if we can *apply* that knowledge in some way. Otherwise, that knowledge is dormant (and so is *not* powerful). Knowledge (intellectual acquisition) is only one part of the equation. We also need to have what has been called “the smarts” if we want to achieve the success we desire. In sport, the smarts is referred to as the “top two inches”, signifying the mental and emotional toughness that is needed to endure difficult or stressful situations, such as a competitive event. To know “stuff” (the non-academic term for knowledge) is helpful but knowing how to manage our social and emotional life makes that knowledge function to our advantage. It was many years before I proved to myself and others that I was not dumb; rather, I needed abilities beyond intellectual ones to succeed, that is, emotional intelligence abilities such as self-awareness, emotional management, and resilience.

Before we consider what we need to know about emotional intelligence, it is helpful to understand and appreciate its development through history. Traditionally, educational scholars were esteemed for their intelligence, the intelligence quotient (IQ) kind, which stressed the importance of cognition (brain power and thought), especially verbal and numerical reasoning, and was therefore unchallengeable because it was “expert knowledge”. In the seventeenth century, René Descartes was known for the saying, *Cogito, ergo sum*, translated into English as “I think, therefore I am.”

This emphasis on the rational explains the implementation of a range of academic measurement practices and pathways that educational institutions adopted to measure intellectual intelligence. For example, in the UK, the 11-plus examination was essentially an intelligence test intended to

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Salovey, Marc Brackett, and John Mayer, eds., *Emotional intelligence: key readings on the Mayer and Salovey model* (Port Chester, NY: Dude Publishing, 2007).

stream children into academic or vocational education from the age of 11 years old.<sup>3</sup> In New Zealand and other parts of the world, primary school children of the 1950s were streamed into schoolroom classes according to their intelligence test results. This streaming was an indication of how much of a grip the idea of intelligence had on our society. Consequently, IQ measured likely success in life in this era. At high school, bright (supposedly intelligent) students were directed into subjects such as languages, history and geography for boys and girls. Gender streaming was applied to the average or middle stream of kids; girls were encouraged to take typing and commercial practice (administration/shorthand), and boys took subjects such as science and computing. The “slow learners” (they were never called that to their faces, but we all knew that is what was meant) were “guided” into practical subjects. Girls took home economics (cooking) and sewing, while boys took woodwork and metalwork. Many students thought to be average or below average were encouraged to drop English and Maths for practical subjects, which naturally affected their ability to increase their knowledge.

I was in the middle stream, and happily, I still had English. I loved English—spelling, reading, and writing. I missed out a bit in reading though. I perceived myself as a slow reader, and in primary school we shared a book between two students, because there weren’t enough to have one each. I was paired with a fast reader (at least I always thought they were better). To save face, I read the first page and pretended I had read the second page, so I did not appear “slow.” Thus, my early days consisted of only reading pages 1, 3, 5, et cetera, while my reading partner whizzed through pages 1 *and* 2, and 3 *and* 4. Later, I figured out that we were probably both trying to save face. Just yesterday, I read a script of just over 76,000 words—123 pages in a day. It is encouraging to know I read faster now.

I have often pondered how some people with amazing talent, intellectual ability and opportunity, seemed to lack the will or motivation to use it, while others with less ability and lack of opportunity ended up achieving more than the first group described here. I gradually became aware that the answer to this conundrum might lie in the concept of emotional intelligence. After graduating with my first degree in Commerce, my research interests led me to learn about self-awareness, delayed gratification, managing one’s own emotions, and the emotions of others; in short, emotional intelligence. It occurred to me that using emotions

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<sup>3</sup> Sophie von Stumm et al., “Intelligence, social class of origin, childhood behavior disturbance and education as predictors of status attainment in midlife in men: The Aberdeen children of the 1950s study,” *Intelligence* 38, no. 1 (2010): 202–11.

appropriately might be as—or more—important than intellectual intelligence in determining personal success. The ability to harness our thoughts and emotions is indeed the difference between just surviving in life or “hitting it out of the park” as this baseball metaphor suggests. Back to my story...

Next, I began to wonder how these emotional attributes might be developed and so my interest in the factors that make for successful emotional intelligence training design, spawned the focus of my PhD. Was this the same kid who had failed School Certificate because of her lack of social and smart skills?<sup>4</sup>

Emotions give expression to what the heart and mind is feeling; sometimes it is physical (we laugh or cry); sometimes it is intuitive (emotional information on autopilot that niggles away at us and is quite often accurate). Wisdom has taught me to listen.

Some of us are afraid of our emotions, perhaps because they make us feel less in control, or because we argue, it is not the “done” thing to express them freely. For example, many boys and men of previous generations were taught that emotions are “weak”, and that *nice* people do not succeed. You must be tough, dispassionate and a rational thinker if you want to get anywhere in this world, as the saying goes. Thankfully, the really smart men refused to be defined by this social rule.

There are many examples of this judgement, such as when a teacher told Thomas Edison, the inventor of the incandescent light bulb that he was “too stupid to learn anything” and that he should go into a field where he “might succeed by virtue of his pleasant personality.” I am very glad Edison did not believe the teacher. Albert Einstein, a theoretical physicist, and Nobel Prize winner did not speak until he was nearly four years old. He was told he “would never amount to much.” Einstein went on to develop the theory of relativity. He is renowned for quotes such as, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”<sup>5</sup> Walt Disney was fired from his newspaper job and was told it was because he did not have any original ideas. His resilience and never-give-up attitude means we still enjoy his creations of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and many more delightful characters. Disney was the recipient of 22 Academy Awards. It is noteworthy that each of these men were not fazed by what others thought, but rather pursued what was in their heart and mind to do. Oprah Winfrey was told she was not suitable as a television host because she could not separate her emotions from the story.

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<sup>4</sup> Lesley Gill, “Exploring trainer perspectives of emotional intelligence training design,” *Business School* (Palmerston North NZ, Massey University, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> “Albert Einstein – Biographical. NobelPrize.Org. Nobel Media AB,” January 12, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/physics/1921/einstein/biographical/>.

| If you can dream it you can have it. Start climbing! |

We must not limit ourselves based on what others say. The ideas and dreams you have are *yours*. They come with a wealth of resources as you venture towards them. The key is to start moving towards them. Open the door of possibility. Make the first phone call. Step into your future today. Develop your capacity to carry the dream to its fruition. Harness the power within.

### **What is all this talk of emotional intelligence about?**

The journey of emotion development is an interesting one that in turn helps us to appreciate our own emotion development and explains that of our parents and grandparents. As explained earlier, the Age of the Enlightenment (1650-1800) placed the spotlight firmly on the importance of rational thought.<sup>6</sup> This Age of Reason was an intellectual and cultural movement that emphasised reason over superstition, and science over faith and emotion. Emotion was thought to be the antithesis of rational thought, considered too unpredictable to be of use to rational thought.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there was a de-emphasis on research into the role and functioning of emotion as a scientific endeavour. Cognitive skills were considered independent and superior to emotions<sup>8</sup> and so the question that nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers focused on was “How do we think?” not “How do we feel?”<sup>9</sup>

In the 1930s, Robert Thorndike began to link emotion with *social* intelligence, defining it as the ability to perceive our own and others’ internal states, motivations and behaviours, and to use these perceptions to act wisely in human interactions.<sup>10</sup> He questioned the validity of intelligence tests as they ignored factors such as the ability to recognise and respond to

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<sup>6</sup> Dimitri Levitin, “From sacred history to the history of religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European historiography from Reformation to Enlightenment” 55, no. 4 (2012): 1117–60.

<sup>7</sup> John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso, “Emotional intelligence: Theory, findings, and implications,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (2004): 197–215.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Gundlach, Mark Martkinko, and Scott Douglas, “Emotional intelligence, causal reasoning, and the self-efficacy development process,” *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 11, no. 3 (2003): 229–36.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Rosenthal, *The emotional revolution* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 2002), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Thorndike, *Personnel selection: Test and measurement techniques* (New York: Wiley, 1949).

the social cues needed to successfully interact with people.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, they were still being used in the 60s and 70s, and some would argue, still are today. Lee Cronbach and Richard Snow's review of aptitude tests added weight to the growing evidence that the level of cognitive ability was not the only predictor of success.<sup>12</sup> Exploring the role of emotions, Thorndike noted that emotional intelligence "isolates a specific set of skills embedded within the abilities that are broadly encompassed in the notion of social intelligence".<sup>13</sup> Gardner also linked emotional intelligence to social factors, and to the ability to control one's inner world which he referred to as the human development of the internal aspects of a person, describing them as:

The core capacity at work here is access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behaviour. In its most primitive form, to distinguish a feeling of pleasure from a feeling of pain...At its most advanced level, intrapersonal knowledge allows one to detect and to symbolize complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings [and] to attain a deep knowledge of a feeling life.<sup>14</sup>

The focus on thought and rationality still dominated but was beginning to erode by the 1970s. It is in this context, and in relation to growing concerns about well-being, that the interest in emotions and emotional life flourished. Emotional intelligence allows us to identify and manage our own and other people's emotions and to use this information to direct our thinking and behaviour appropriately. Early in the study of EI, there was an interest in whether it can be developed or whether it is like the constructs of cognitive ability (IQ), which states that it is relatively fixed and therefore not amenable to change.<sup>15</sup> The consensus is that EI *can* be developed

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<sup>11</sup> David Wechsler, "Cognitive, conative, and non-intellective intelligence," *Selected Papers of David Wechsler* 5, no. 3 (1950): 78–83.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Cronbach and Richard Snow, *Aptitudes and instructional methods: A handbook for research on interactions* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Thorndike, *Personnel selection; Test and measurement techniques*, 331.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 239.

<sup>15</sup> Victor Dulewicz and Malcolm Higgs, "Can emotional intelligence be developed?" *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 15, no. 1 (2004): 95–111.

(referred to as plasticity) although a major factor in learning is the recipients' self-awareness of the need for it.<sup>16</sup>

Neal Ashkanasy and Catherine Daus<sup>17</sup> noted the term “emotional intelligence” (EI), although used occasionally in the 1960s, made its first serious academic appearance in Wayne Payne’s doctoral thesis.<sup>18</sup> However, the term did not appear in published work until it was adopted by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in their article, *Emotional intelligence: Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*.<sup>19</sup> Regarded as the pioneers of emotional intelligence, Peter Salovey, John Mayer and David Caruso were also the first to publish a definition of emotional intelligence and are honoured for the significant research they have undertaken in this field.<sup>20</sup> Mayer and Salovey’s definition of emotional intelligence emphasised four branches of increasing ability: to perceive, to access, to understand and to regulate one’s emotions. “Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth”.<sup>21</sup>

Around the same time, Daniel Goleman was undertaking research on “emotional literacy”. His research took him to the work of Salovey and Mayer and so he adopted the term “emotional intelligence”.<sup>22</sup> Gibbs, Epperson and Mondy<sup>23</sup> acknowledge Goleman’s ability to demystify academic writing as showcased in his book *Emotional intelligence: Why it*

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<sup>16</sup> Vanessa Druskat and Steven Wolff, “Building the emotional intelligence of groups,” *Harvard Business Review* 79, no. 3 (2001): 80–90; Bill George and Peter Sims, *True North* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Neal Ashkanasy and Catherine Daus, “Emotion in the workplace: The new challenge for managers,” *Academy of Management Executive* 16, no. 1 (2002): 76–86.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Payne, “A study of emotion: Developing emotional intelligence; self-integration; relation to fear, pain and desire” (Doctoral, Cincinnati, Union Graduate School, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Peter Salovey and John Mayer, “Emotional intelligence,” *Imagination, cognition and personality* 9 (1990): 185–211.

<sup>20</sup> John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso, “Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test item booklet,” 2002.

<sup>21</sup> John Mayer and Peter Salovey, “What Is emotional intelligence?” in *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Implications for educators*, ed. Peter Salovey and David Sluyter (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Gibbs, Sharon Epperson, and Lawrence Mondy, “The EQ factor,” *Time*, February 10, 1995.

*can matter more than IQ*. He organised the concept of EI into four areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Whereas Salovey and Mayer are credited with bringing EI philosophy to the scientific world, Goleman is recognised for bringing a popularist view of EI to public attention. Goleman's definition of emotional intelligence refers to "...abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathise and to hope".<sup>24</sup>

This brief timeline of emotional intelligence development highlights the increasing interest and acceptance that human beings are complex beings, who need to express the dual voice of heart and mind appropriately, and which in turn informs their actions. So far we have established that we are created with intellect *and* emotions and we have been designed to express them—appropriately of course. While some of us may not have had an ideal start in life, the good news is, it is never too late to learn. Additionally, we need to acknowledge there are cultural norms as to how we express our emotions, usually referred to as "display rules" which vary across cultures, countries and social systems.

This book aims to help us to increase our self-awareness in a way that proactively develops our emotional intelligence and guides us into new insights that gently lead to us choosing to adopt new behaviours.

Emotions express what is going on on the inside and help us make sense of our thinking, feelings, and the events unfolding around us. Our emotions are *meant* to be listened to because they provide vital data that help us in our decision making and choices. Have we "turned the sound down" – or off – to the voice of our heart, our emotions?

The concept of a "workshop for one" is used throughout this book. The activities can also be undertaken in small groups. Each chapter focuses on a different topic while offering practical ways for increasing your EI skills, and refuelling your emotional "tank", thereby supporting personal and professional development and success. As you read these pages, expect to do something differently. Also, as your awareness grows, you might need to change some of the things you are *thinking and saying* about yourself. Some of the things you *do* are pulling you down, and not building you up, so you will need to change some of your behaviours – at your own speed.

Some time ago, the following question was posed to me: "Who do you need to become to achieve your dream?" While this seemed a fairly innocuous question on the first pass, it really challenged me in that if I was already "that person" the dream would have happened. That simple question

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<sup>24</sup> Goleman, *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, 34.

made me reflect and ponder what areas of learning I still needed, what skill acquisition, attitudes, confidence, emotional intelligence, character, and infinitum would take me towards the success I sought.

Within these pages, you will be able to actively and somewhat seamlessly apply the information and activities to develop *your* self-awareness, resilience, empathy, and emotion management and others, as well as learn skills for managing the chaos of change that life inevitably throws at us. I hope you choose the harder and braver course of action and take the steps you need to take, to harness the power within, towards becoming the best version of *you*.

The chapters contain many ideas, **CAN DO** activities and reflective questions that are there to support your journey into harnessing the power of your emotions; the power within. You will need courage, determination and a willingness to be honest about where you are on this journey of transformation. *Kia kaha!* Stay strong.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INSIGHTS INTO SELF-AWARENESS

In the previous chapter we briefly explored the concept of emotional intelligence and considered reasons why we need it to harness the power within. In this chapter we explore insights into ourselves (and others) as we develop our self-awareness. Many of us have just accepted, even defended ourselves by saying, “This is who I am—like it or lump it”, meaning we are not the one who needs to or will change. While the idea that it is always the other person who should change, it is really just a cop-out so as not to do any work on ourselves.

An unwillingness to change can signal that a person does not want to own up to their weaknesses or is afraid to be honest with themselves. They deploy defensiveness, blame or anger as strategies to hide their perceived or real deficits. Developing our self-awareness does not need to be feared. I have found that oftentimes other people already know about our weaknesses and strengths, and love and accept us anyway; it is usually only us who is in the dark. Stepping into the light of self-insight offers a wonderful opportunity to harness the power within. By knowing ourselves better, we can use our strengths more strategically to accept or develop strategies to address our weaknesses and develop our strengths.

During my many years of teaching I have noticed that it is not always the most talented people who succeed. Instead, other determining factors appear to influence success such as the following factors. Firstly, as expected, to get started we need some *talent* in the area we want to pursue (that is, am I able to do it?) including adopting a disciplined approach to hone that talent. Secondly, we need *opportunity* to achieve it linked to an *appropriate reward* (that is, what will I receive for my efforts?). Thirdly, and very importantly, we need to highly *value* the result (that is, how much do I want it – or not?). Next, we need *perseverance* to sustain the time lag and do the hard work needed between the dream and the reality. Developing our emotional intelligence is key in achieving the success we are striving after. We need to have our eyes and ears “on” to see and hear *opportunity knocking*.

I have seen something else under the sun:  
 The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong,  
 nor does food come to the wise  
 or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned.  
 But time and chance happen to them all.<sup>25</sup>

This quote points out that even with the best training, knowledge, skills, and hard work there are no guarantees. We can expect that sometimes others will get to their goals before us. Perhaps you missed out on the job that you thought was perfect for you, or some other opportunity that passed you by. Life is not fair. Indeed, sometimes life is downright nasty. Nevertheless, the quote above is quite encouraging because it suggests that everyone gets a break at some point, and also that success can happen in imperfect conditions (that is, you do not have to be an A+ student in everything). This is good news. Your road to success might be longer in achieving your dream, whether goal achievement or personal development. It might take more time, sweat and tears—but if you have got “your ears on” you will recognise opportunity when it comes. Why? Because you are looking for it, while others may not be. That is what gives you the edge. It is funny what you notice when you are deliberately looking for it. When I was eyeing up the purchase of a new car, suddenly I noticed every car of a particular make and model on the road. Why? Because I was looking.

A word to the wise—do not be afraid to ask the hard or awkward questions “in the very moment”—when the opportunity presents itself because it is usually a very limited window of opportunity—seize the moment! My Dad’s best advice was, “What is the worst they can say: No. So what! Keep asking. Eventually someone will say ‘yes!’” The value you put on the thing you are seeking often determines the enthusiasm you have in looking for it. Nevertheless, if you miss one opportunity do not worry. Eventually a different opportunity will present itself. In the meantime, consider it a useful lesson to hone your skills.

Self-awareness is a key component of harnessing the power within and therefore developing our emotional intelligence. Self-awareness is the door. Before we can start developing our self-awareness we need to figure out what it is and why we need it. Self-awareness is described as the “ability to accurately perceive, understand and accept oneself”.<sup>26</sup> Mike Bagshaw<sup>27</sup> describes self-awareness as the ability to consult our inner feelings

<sup>25</sup> Eccles. 9:1 (New International Version).

<sup>26</sup> Reuven Bar-On, *The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i): A test of emotional intelligence* (Toronto: Multi-Health Systems, 1997), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Bagshaw, “Emotional intelligence: Training people to be affective so they can be effective,” *Industrial and Commercial Training* 32, no. 2 (2000): 61–65.

accurately. John Mayer and Peter Salovey describe self-awareness as the ability to “identify emotion in one’s physical state, feelings and thoughts” and to be able to differentiate accurately.<sup>28</sup> Increasing our self-awareness is about seeing how other people see us, as well as taking a fresh look at ourselves without rose-coloured glasses, as the saying goes. Without self-awareness, we are missing the ability to appreciate the influence and impact we have on others in our personal relationships at home, school, work, in a sports team, and so on. In fact, we might not have even considered the effect of our attitudes, words, and actions on others.

Key things we need to get started on this journey of increasing our self-awareness include an open mind, courage, especially if we discover something we don’t like about ourselves, the humility to acknowledge we do not know it all, and acceptance that we have weaknesses and limitations. We need a willingness to work with new insights about ourselves and others, and to actively change our thoughts, words, and actions.

| Self-awareness helps us to know *where* to make changes. |

Self-awareness is a person’s “ability to assess others’ evaluations of the self and to incorporate these assessments into one’s self-evaluation.”<sup>29</sup> Seeing through others’ eyes can create a-ha moments of self-awareness that help us see we need to change. It is usually not until something or someone creates a desire—or a distress—that pushes us towards deciding to make changes.

Developing our self-awareness can have a negative side too. For example, the insights might surprise or shock us. We all want to think that we are nice people, and perhaps we will discover things we do not like about ourselves. We tend to judge others on their behaviours and ourselves on our motives. That is a problem. The process of “developing our self-awareness can be deeply disturbing, creating inner turmoil and a sense of chaos in our lives”.<sup>30</sup> Developing our self-awareness offers us the opportunity to gently uncover the best (and perhaps the worst) of “us” through activities that by their nature offers insights into self. Acknowledgement that we *need* to change pre-empts any conscious decision to intentionally develop our self-awareness actively.

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<sup>28</sup> Mayer and Salovey, “What is emotional intelligence?” 10.

<sup>29</sup> Leanne Atwater and Francis Yammarino, “Does self-other agreement on leadership perceptions moderate the validity of leadership and performance predictions?” *Personnel Psychology* 45 (1992): 143.

<sup>30</sup> Gill, “Exploring trainer perspectives of emotional intelligence training design,” 66.

Self-awareness is also about recognising when our own reaction to a situation is exaggerated or inappropriate for that situation. We realise that our response to a situation is not only counter-productive but is out of “sync” with the situation or event. Perhaps what we are experiencing is that the event we are currently in has acted as a trigger for something that has happened earlier. This occasion poses the perfect opportunity that allows us to unload our emotions generated from an earlier situation or event, which have been simmering away undetected below the surface until now. Perhaps we could not share our real feelings before. However, emotions have a way of finding their way to the surface by themselves, often at the most inconvenient times, catching us off guard. Escalation of our emotions is a good indication that we have unfinished business on the inside to deal with and work through.

Daniel Goleman commented that people who are emotionally intelligent are aware of their emotions and are able to regulate them, describing self-awareness as having a deep understanding of one’s strengths, limitations and values.<sup>31</sup> We demonstrate our self-awareness through “the ability to recognise and understand moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others”.<sup>32</sup> Self-awareness does not exist in isolation, always occurring alongside awareness of others.<sup>33</sup>

Other people also act as a mirror for evaluating our own behaviour. Their responses can give us a hint as to how others receive our words, actions, and effect on other people. In turn, their comments also provide valuable feedback—but only if we are self-aware enough to notice. After any meal, we have all had to ask, “Do I have food stuck in my teeth?” We are frequently unaware of that little piece of food that everyone else can see! We must ask others (or check in a mirror) because we just do not know what they can see that we, ourselves, cannot see. It is also important to ask because other people rarely bring it to our attention (even though it would prevent us from feeling embarrassed). We generally believe that our perceptions of ourselves are accurate. Some people might say, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Guess what? If you do not even know it is broken, then you do not know to fix it.

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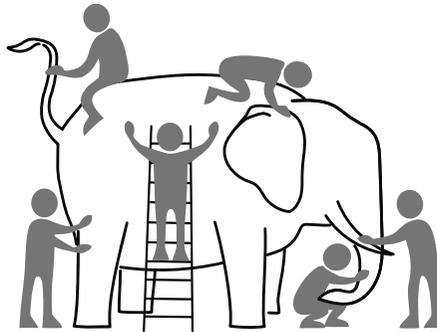
<sup>31</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership: The power of emotional intelligence* (Northampton CA: More Than Sound LLC, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Goleman, “What makes a leader?” *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. Nov-Dec (1998): 95.

<sup>33</sup> John Mayer, Maria DiPaolo, and Peter Salovey, “Perceiving affective content in ambiguous visual stimuli: A component of emotional intelligence,” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 54, no. 3–4 (1990): 772–81.

Increasing our self-awareness hones our ability to see what is right in front of us. Self-awareness enriches our life. Knowing ourselves well builds self-acceptance and self-confidence, which allows us to build stronger relationships with others because we are more willing to be vulnerable and transparent. Greater self-awareness makes it possible to lead with our strengths and empower others' strengths because we know about them. This brings out the best in everyone and produces greater results and stronger relationships. Developing our self-awareness logically leads to personal improvement if we choose to take notice of the new insights. When we are aware and accurate in our evaluations, we can then identify what to target for personal development.

Before we start discovering new insights about ourselves, we must acknowledge that we all look through “cracked lenses”. Our perceptions of what others and we say and do, are often inaccurate because we perceive it through the things we have experienced in the past, our upbringing, and cultural norms. Some of these experiences were hurtful and negative so that they blur or bias what we perceive. Self-awareness can be confusing, since we can all be involved in the same situation but “see” different things, as this image of six blind experts demonstrates. Our insights are always dependent on the limited or “broken” information we know or recall about a situation or circumstance, which inform our perceptions of today’s reality.



**Figure 1: Expert perceptions.**<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Godfrey Saxe, *The poems of John Godfrey Saxe: The six blind men and the elephant*, 1872.

Perceptions and perspectives of the same situation change between people based on their values and experiences, the context of the situation, and the emotional state (mood) they (and we) are in at the time. It is important to confirm our perceptions from more than one viewpoint to ensure their accuracy.

### **Practical ways for increasing our self-awareness**

This next section introduces different ways and models for increasing our self-awareness. Take your time as you apply each one in a “workshop for one” activity. You are worth investing your time in.

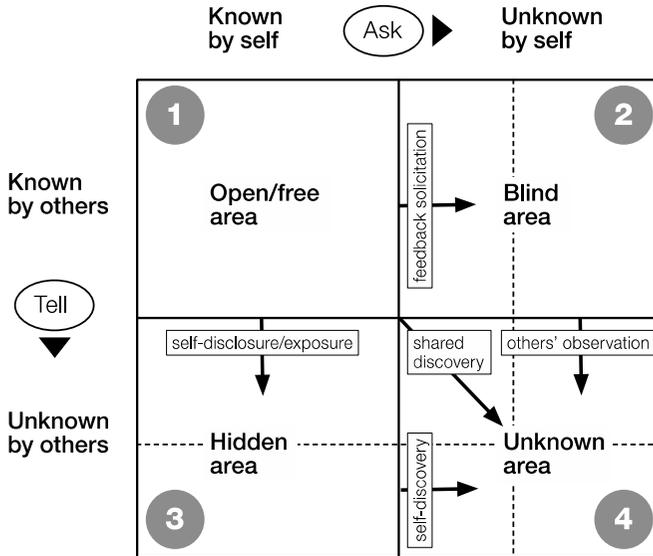
A helpful way to picture your self-awareness is by using the concept of the Johari Window that Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham designed.<sup>35</sup> The Johari Window sometimes called a disclosure or feedback model has four distinct areas:

- The Open area: known to self and others.
- The Blind area: known to others but not yourself.
- The Hidden area: known by self and deliberately hidden from others.
- The Unknown area: no one knows, therefore not amenable to change (so this block is empty).

The diagram below plots these four areas:

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Luft, “The Johari Window: A graphic model of awareness in interpersonal relations,” *Human Relations Training News* 5, no. 1 (1961): 6–7. Used with permission.

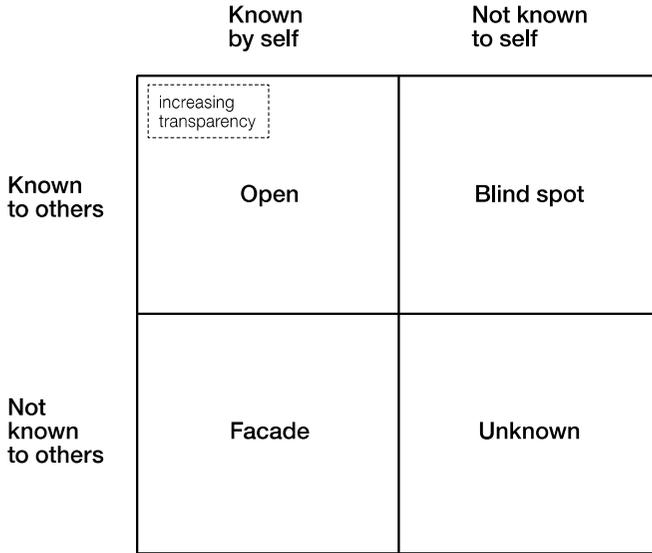


**Figure 2: Johari Window model.**

The objective of the model is to enlarge the area known by self and others. Luft and Ingham suggest that if a person discloses things about themselves to another person, and others provide feedback to them, it creates a window into aspects of their life, previously hidden to all. Self and others’ observations offer us a treasure trove of feedback and personal insights.

**CAN DO**

Complete the Johari Window template.



**Figure 3: Johari Window template.**

Getting feedback from others is a useful process for helping us recognise instinctive, often unconscious patterns of thinking, speaking and behaviour. Sometimes the feedback we receive can be quite unexpected, overwhelming, or confusing, unless we are able to recognise these observations in our personal patterns of thinking, speaking and actions. These insights, whether our own or those of others about us, act as “snapshots” into our behaviour creating a-ha moments in our lives, or opportunities to confirm what we already know about ourselves, thereby offering a platform to harness the power of these insights. Congratulate yourself on choosing to increase your self-awareness.

By default, we might describe ourselves in harshly judgmental ways. However, such a self-imposed judgement can make the process of self-awareness disheartening. It is important that if we choose to take ourselves on this journey of self-awareness, we must be kind to ourselves. Recognising patterns in our thinking and behaviour involves reflection that leads to a higher level of self-awareness. Identifying these different patterns of thinking provides a basis for us to understand why we experience these different patterns of thinking, performance and participation, and utilise