

Self-directed learning: managing yourself and your working relationships

How to Develop your Emotional Intelligence

Listed below are some simple and practical steps you can take to help develop the five components of Emotional Intelligence.

1. Self-Awareness

- Accept that we all experience a wide variety of emotions and that although we cannot choose the emotions we experience, we can choose how we respond to these emotions (see: Self-Management section).
- Practise labelling your emotions, 'I feel...,' and take responsibility for how you feel rather than blaming others. For example, 'I feel scared when you drive fast', rather than 'you drive like an idiot'.
- Identify the physical sensations you experience associated with strong emotions. Remaining alert to these physical cues and early warning signs may help you identify the different emotions you are experiencing and in turn to react in a more controlled manner.
- Journaling (taking time at the end of the day to make a written note of the emotions and events you have experienced) can help you to reflect on the different emotions you have experienced and their potential causes; over time you may be able to identify patterns in your behaviour and pinpoint specific triggers.
- Do an 'emotional check-in' several times a day by stopping for a few minutes and asking yourself, 'how am I feeling?' 'what emotion is this?' and 'how strong is this emotion?' Combining this approach with reflective emotional journaling at the end of the day will increase your emotional literacy and ultimately enable you to recognise your emotions in 'real time'.

2. Self-Management

- Use your power of choice. We cannot control the outer world but we can be in charge of our thoughts and actions and how we respond to the outer world. For example, when a colleague publicly criticizes you, emotional self-management means that you would acknowledge you are upset but also acknowledge your conscious choice not to over react at this moment, and to tackle it later.

- It is important to look after yourself physically, ensuring you get adequate rest, physical exercise and appropriate nutrition. It is not scientifically proven, but commonly accepted that there is a link between certain foods and some negative mood states and when we are tired and hungry we may react inappropriately to some emotional states. Exercise also produces positive emotional states associated with the release of endorphins, the natural “feel good” hormones.
- Practice impulse control. If you know that a certain situation or contact with a certain individual tends to evoke negative emotional responses then either avoid these situations or practise ‘counting to ten’ or using another temporary distraction technique to avoid reacting impulsively.
- Identify situations, events, activities or individuals, which promote a positive emotional response within you and learn how to harness these as mood enhancers.
- Learn from emotional self-management experiences. As part of your journaling process it can be useful to reflect on the success, or not, of your self-management strategies and to identify how you could do things differently next time.
- Accept that changing your responses can take time. Try not to punish or criticise yourself for ‘failing’ if changing your behaviour takes some time to achieve. Make a conscious choice not to over react at this moment, and to tackle it later.

3. Motivation

- Identify what motivates you and how you can use these motivators to pull or push you forward when you are feeling unmotivated. For example, if at work you are motivated by the desire to help others then seek feedback from those you have helped, make a note of their positive comments and either position these as a clear visual reminder or revisit the comments regularly.
- Know what you want out of life and set goals and milestones to achieve these. Recognising and celebrating your progress will make it easier to address setbacks and obstacles should they occur.
- Monitor and challenge your self-talk. Do you constantly talk down to yourself or build yourself up? Be alert to negative phrases such as ‘that will never work’ or ‘this is hard work’. Writing down your negative thoughts can make them easier to challenge; ask yourself ‘is this 100% true?’ or ‘where is the evidence to support this view?’ Recognising that things may not be as black and white as you imagine may encourage you to move forward again.
- Read motivational books and quotations and be inspired by the challenges overcome by others or previously by yourself.
- As far as possible surround yourself with positive, motivated people.

4. Empathy

- Practice active listening. This is the process whereby you engage yourself fully and without judgement to listening with your head, heart, ears and eyes to the other person.
- Encourage others to express their feelings; ask ‘so how does that make you feel?’ or ‘on a scale of 1 to 10 how angry are you?’
- Check you are correctly interpreting the feelings; ‘it sounds like you are feeling ... am I right?’

- Develop the ability to read and interpret body language cues.
- Ensure that you validate the feelings of others. Examples of simple validating phrases include: 'I hear you', 'that's not good', 'that must hurt', 'and that's a lot to deal with'.

5. Relationship Management

- Be open about your feelings and expectations in a situation.
- Take time to really get to know people and learn about their feelings and expectations. For example, ask: 'what is important to you about this situation?' and 'how do you feel about this situation?'
- When first meeting someone build rapport by using familiar language and matching pace and tone of conversation.
- Set feeling objectives and outcomes for a joint activity. Discuss how all those involved want to feel about the situation / outcome etc. For example as part of a team building event one of the desired outcomes may be that all those involved leave the event feeling valued.
- Ask for feedback on the impact of your actions and offer constructive feedback yourself.