

Chapter 2: Seven Steps for Improving Your Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is paramount to living a happy, healthy life. It may seem like some people are born with confidence, or that some people are predisposed to an elevated level of emotional intelligence, and depending on the environment in which someone grew up, their background and life experiences, emotional intelligence may come easier to some people than it does to others. Some people need to work much harder than others to get and maintain a healthy level of emotional intelligence. Luckily, there are ways to improve your emotional intelligence, and all it takes is a little practice and some self-awareness. Emotional intelligence can be improved upon in many ways, but here are seven methods that you should make a habit of practicing.

Believe Your Intuition: Intuition is that little gut feeling you have, that nagging in the back of your mind, when you are trying to make a decision or decide whether or not to trust a situation. Our gut feelings or intuition are often based on past experiences in similar situations. Your gut is telling you something for a reason, and more often than not it tends to be correct. While some people dismiss this feeling, intuitive people listen to what their mind is trying to tell them. If you have ever had to make a decision and were leaning heavily towards one outcome, or if you've even been in a situation where your stomach was upset and you felt nervous, that was your intuition trying to tell you something. There are countless stories of people who have done something that proved to be beneficial in the end yet couldn't explain why they acted the way they did at the time. Perhaps someone impulsively decided to take a different route to work but couldn't decide what made them decide to take an outer road instead of the highway, only to find out later that they made the right decision because there was a major accident on their usual route to work. Not only did the intuitive person avoid sitting in traffic, but he or she may also have prevented themselves from being involved in a serious or fatal accident. Unexplained decisions or events such as these are your intuition at work.

Intuition is a sign of emotional intelligence. You can improve your intuition by taking the time to spend alone, concentrating on your thoughts, journaling, and paying attention to what your mind is trying to tell you. The mind is a powerful thing, if only we let it work to its full capacity. The more you pay attention to your thoughts, the stronger your intuition will become.

Set Boundaries: Any relationship, whether it is a romantic relationship, a relationship between co-workers, a friendship, or a family relationship, should have healthy boundaries. An emotionally intelligent person recognizes their own feelings and can determine if someone else's inappropriate words or actions are causing them to feel uncomfortable. An emotionally intelligent person knows what they are willing to put up with, and what behaviors are intolerable. An emotionally intelligent person is direct and will tell someone if their language or behavior is making them uncomfortable, because they are able to recognize their own feelings and are in tune with why they feel the way they do. The emotionally intelligent person is also able to set boundaries and be assertive because they do not allow themselves to feel guilty for feeling a certain way.

An emotionally intelligent person knows what their values are and will not compromise these values. If someone does something to go against what the emotionally intelligent person

believes, there will be consequences in place for the behavior. For example, if a friend continues to cancel plans or does not show up when the plans are made, the emotionally intelligent person would recognize that the friend has crossed a boundary, and he or she must decide if the consequence they wish to bestow upon the offending friend is to end the friendship. If someone continues to treat someone else badly, but the recipient of the bad behavior continues to allow it to happen, the offender is receiving no consequences, and will therefore continue to upset the other person with their undesirable behavior. The offender is taking advantage of the other person, who is unwilling or has not chosen to set boundaries. An emotionally intelligent person will let the other person know that his or her behavior is not acceptable. Quite possibly, the offender may not have even known their actions were upsetting to the other person. If the upsetting actions continue, then the offender clearly does not respect the other person's boundaries and consequences should be enforced, whether that means ending the friendship or keeping the other person at a distance. The emotionally intelligent person has no problem setting boundaries and enforcing these boundaries, because they have the self-confidence to know that they are worth receiving fair treatment.

Practice Good Communication: An emotionally intelligent person has excellent communication skills, because they know what they want, have set their boundaries, and do not waste time mincing words or saying things that can be construed in a way other than they intended. They also practice excellent communication skills by listening when speaking to someone. When conversing with someone, the emotionally intelligent person listens to what the other person is saying. They make eye contact and do not become distracted by their phone or other people around them. They listen to hear what is being said, they don't just listen to see how they can respond with their own story. People like to feel appreciated, and anyone who is taking the time to talk to you does not want to be outdone by your story or made to feel like you could not wait for their story to end so you could share your own story. The emotionally intelligent person also thinks before he or she speaks. If you have only listened to someone else talk so that you could have your own turn, you have not allowed yourself the time to process what they are saying and respond appropriately. The emotionally intelligent person does not just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind; they reflect on what the speaker said and respond appropriately.

Another important aspect of effective communication is body language. Emotionally intelligent people are in tune not only with themselves, but with those around them. Making eye contact, smiling, and keeping your body turned towards the speaker are all signs of good communication skills. Folding your arms, shuffling impatiently back and forth, turning your body away from the speaker, and constantly checking your phone are sure signs that you are not paying attention to what the speaker is saying. Not only is this behavior rude, but it does not lend itself to effective communication because you are not devoting your full attention to the speaker, which may cause you to miss some key points.

Just as in-person communication skills are vital to an enjoyable conversation, an emotionally intelligent person knows that written communication is just as important. Double check text messages and emails to make sure they say exactly what you intend to say. Remember, mentally tough and emotionally intelligent people will be direct with their words so that the intended

meaning of their message cannot be misconstrued. Check for typos or words that have been corrected to mean something else. Read the text message or email out loud to yourself if you are unsure of how it sounds. Taking a few extra seconds to double check your work is worth the embarrassment of inadvertently sending the wrong message.

Overcome Obstacles in Life: An emotionally intelligent person can overcome obstacles in their life. They view obstacles as a challenge and often have a game plan and a backup plan in case their original plan does not work. The first step to overcoming an obstacle is to break the process down into smaller, more manageable chunks. It is impossible to write an entire novel in a day, so maybe the emotionally intelligent person will make it their goal to write one chapter a week. Likewise, an emotionally intelligent person who has just lost their job might make it their goal to apply to three jobs per day, taking the time to perfect their cover letter and tailor their resume to each of these jobs. An emotionally intelligent person will then chart their progress and reflect on their journey. Perhaps he or she will note on a calendar what jobs they applied for on what day, or maybe they will reflect on how they can manage their time more wisely in order to write two chapters of their novel in a week instead of only one chapter.

In addition to setting small goals, an emotionally intelligent person is not afraid to ask for guidance and input, or a listening ear at the very least. An emotionally intelligent person embraces challenges and obstacles, but also welcomes opinions from other sources. He or she knows it sometimes pays to get other perspectives on a situation, and someone else could bring a new outlook that he or she hadn't thought of. A true emotionally intelligent person welcomes other perspectives, while someone who is only acting tough wants to do things their own way all the time.

One quick way to overcome an obstacle or get a new perspective is to simply take a break. Go outside, get some fresh air, take the dog for a walk. Giving your mind a break and a chance to think about something else will give you a fresh look when you go back to said obstacle. Upon your return, you can evaluate the obstacle. Is this as difficult as it once seemed? A change of scenery could very well change your entire approach.

Maintain a Schedule: An emotionally intelligent person knows there is a benefit to maintaining a daily routine. While in our younger days we might have balked at the idea of getting up early and living by a set schedule, an emotionally intelligent person knows a schedule is vital to reducing stress. Imagine if you woke up late every day with no plan for the day. It might sound fun at first, but the truth is, most people would become depressed sitting around all day with nothing to do, or on the opposite end of the spectrum, they would become stressed out by the number of tasks they need to complete without any rhyme or reason of when these tasks needed to be completed.

If you make a list of all the things you need to accomplish for the day, then cross them off individually when you complete each task, you will be amazed at the sense of accomplishment you feel. Seeing your progress as you make your way down the list not only makes you feel productive, it actually *is* productive. Moving from one task to the next gives you an end goal in sight, and you can see the award of free time, the proverbial light shining at the end of the tunnel.

Not only does this routine give you a feeling of accomplishment, but it helps you eliminate wasted time, much of which is most likely spent making nonessential decisions. For example, if you get into the habit of going to the gym first thing in the morning, you will not have to spend the rest of your day trying to decide when and if you should go; you will already be done for the day.

A mentally strong person thrives off the daily routine because it provides a sense of accomplishment, which also boosts confidence and self-esteem. They can see the progress they have made each day, which in turn motivates the mentally strong person to persevere.

Eliminate Fear of Rejection: Rejection, or even the fear of rejection, can be very painful, but emotionally intelligent people know that sometimes rejection is just a part of life, and they view rejections as one more opportunity for self-improvement and a chance to grow. By practicing a few techniques and improving self-esteem, you can eliminate the fear of rejection. The first step to eliminating this fear is to stop assuming you will be rejected in the first place. When people assume they will be rejected, they subconsciously display behaviors that ultimately get them rejected. The fear of rejection becomes a reality.

Another way to eliminate the fear of rejection is to picture yourself succeeding. The mind is a powerful thing, and if you think positively, not allowing yourself to picture or see yourself in a rejected state, you can overcome this fear.

A final solution to overcoming fear of rejection is to give yourself options so that if one thing doesn't work out, you will have other possibilities. Rejection from one job interview does not feel as defeating if you have already lined up other interviews, or at the very least, if you have applied at other places of employment. If you are applying for a job, odds are in today's economy, the company is receiving hundreds, possibly thousands, of applications to fill only one position. It goes without saying that the company will not be able to hire every single person. By applying for several jobs at once, or even branching out to consider a different, yet similar line of work, you are opening up more possibilities for yourself and reducing your fear of rejection.

An emotionally healthy person can keep their mind open to new possibilities and different opportunities, even if the new situation is out of their comfort zone. An emotionally healthy person steps out of their comfort zone, accepts new challenges, and gives themselves plenty of options so they do not have to feel rejected by just one person or opportunity.

Reduce Anxiety: An emotionally intelligent person understands that feeling anxious is not beneficial. It is normal to be nervous before a test, a job interview, or a huge presentation, but when the panicky feelings, upset stomach, rapid heartbeat, and sweaty palms become an everyday occurrence, anxiety is taking its toll on your body and preventing you from achieving your goals. If you let it go on too long, anxiety can snowball and negatively affect your life.

Part of being an emotionally intelligent person is recognizing your feelings and identifying what is causing them. Realizing that you are feeling anxious is the first step. Once you are able to accept the fact that you are feeling anxious and that it is okay to feel this way, you can identify the source of the anxiety. Begin by asking yourself whether or not your fears are real, if the

situation or scenario you are imagining is likely to happen, and, worse-case scenario, if it does happen, will it really matter tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.

One way to eliminate anxiety is to focus your attention somewhere else. Take a break from what is bothering you and cross a few tasks off of that to-do list you made earlier. By accomplishing a goal you already set for yourself, you will experience a sense of accomplishment and improved self-esteem, which are key factors in emotional intelligence.