



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE: The New Science of Human Relationships

by Daniel Goleman



Overview

Intentionally managing and being aware of the quality of one's relationships is known as *social intelligence*. Social intelligence affects our decisions, which in turn affects our lives. Understanding it will teach compassion and empathy, help you to improve your personal relationships, and lead a happier, fulfilling social life. This book describes specific components of the brain involved in social intelligence, how to control your emotional response in social situations, and the dangerous Dark Triad personality traits to avoid.

"The most fundamental revelation of this new discipline: we are wired to connect."

Prologue. Unveiling a New Science

Our brains have evolved to rely on social interaction to remain psychologically healthy. *Spindle cells* exist to guide social decisions, and *mirror neurons* anticipate and imitate others' reactions. The social brain is *neuroplastic*, meaning it can morph its own physiology (via growing or discarding neurons) in response to repeated stimuli. When these stimuli are positive (e.g. with healthy, fulfilling social relationships) the brain grows and strengthens. If these stimuli are negative (e.g. with abusive or frustrating relationships) the brain can suffer serious long-term damage. With technology distracting everyone, we neglect our relationships and ignore the importance of social intelligence. For example, teens will get lost in their headphones, and adults will respond to emails during family vacations.

PART 1. WIRED TO CONNECT

Chapter 1. The Emotional Economy

The emotional economy is a network in which emotions are traded through social interactions. These emotions are detected by the *amygdala*, which is the center of the brain's *limbic system* (a network responsible for regulating emotions and instinctual drives). When the

brain receives information from social interactions, signals travel through the *neocortex* (where they are scanned for logical meaning) and through the *amygdala* (where they are scanned for emotional meaning).

"We participate in this interpersonal economy whenever a social interaction results in a transfer of feeling – which is virtually always."

The brain processes emotions on the *low road* and the *high road*. The low road functions subconsciously, sensing subtle emotions in every interaction. It registers information quickly to help make snap decisions. The high road is much more methodical; it processes information slowly, working its way through several neural systems before deciding, as a more logical check on the low road's split-second judgements. ([Click here to purchase our summary of Thinking Fast & Slow which describes these 2 systems in detail.](#))

Emotions are often thought of as something private that should be hidden or dulled when around others. However, people's feelings are far more interconnected than we tend to think; emotions felt by one person have a strong effect on those around them. For example, in a study of people watching videos of couples arguing, simply watching the videos evoked emotions such as frustration and anger in participants, and some participants even subconsciously mimicked their body language and facial expressions. This is a result of *empathy* – the ability to sense and understand the emotions of others via mirror neurons.

Chapter 2. A Recipe for Rapport

Rapport is a connection derived from a feeling of mutual understanding; it results in a sense of harmony, friendliness, and generosity, which strengthens social bonds. Building rapport involves 3 ingredients:

1. **Mutual Attention:** When attention is distracted, details are overlooked, common interest is eschewed, and positive connections are dismissed.

