Strategies to Enhance Emotional Intelligence

Life Skills for Success

Alka Wadkar
STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is a personality dynamic, characteristic or potential that can be nurtured and developed. Hence, emotional intelligence of any individual can be enhanced if enough motivation and training is available. The whole process of socialization can be utilized for the development of emotional intelligence.

SELF AWARENESS AND ANCHORING

Anchoring is the wise use of conditioned response. One can train oneself to give a particular emotional response after one gets a particular cue. Many great people maintain their self-image and public image using this strategy. Emotional resource state or emotional state is the response given to a particular stimulus. A particular emotional state having a particular emotional, intellectual, and physical component is called as mood. Stress is the lowest type of response which basically has two options—flight or fight. Those who are emotionally literate know the benefits of anchoring. For example, a person who is participating in a running competition will think and have the image that he or she is like a leopard and can run fast. Even in stress management, what type of emotional state will be appropriate in that situation, and how can that be achieved, are important issues.

Anchoring can be learned by observing and recording our own emotional experiences. It takes time and sensitivity. The methods used for that are:

a. Traditional diary method—Write, in detail, all important emotional experiences regarding various daily activities like reading new books.

b. Change in perspective—Second type is writing about the same thing from a different perspective. If you try and interpret the same activity as a member of teaching community or as a student, you will be able to understand the other side of truth and others’ perception. One has to identify changes in physiological reactions while changing the perspective.

c. Split entry journal—Divide a page into two parts, on one hand we have to write actually what has happened, the actual interactions, etc., and on the other hand one has to write emotional responses, physiological changes, and anchoring.

d. Directed associative journal—One has to write the how and why of emotional experiences. We have to underline the important words. This is useful for enhancing self-understanding.

e. Charting the day—Here, we should prepare a graph of emotions throughout the day. This gives a clear understanding regarding one’s emotional life. It indicates patterns of responses and triggers in one’s emotional expressions. The mildest and strongest feelings are seen obviously on the basis of the job. If the strongest emotions are negative, then we must try to manage it. If emotional ups and downs depend on time, then activities done at that time should be considered. Even if you take a canvas and colors to indicate your emotional experiences of the day, that gives a feedback.

f. Speak and feel exchange—Discuss what you feel and what are the physiological changes associated with them with someone. This skill is essential even for conflict management. The reconfirmation of these should be done by the other person as a feedback. This activity increases awareness about the relationship between mind and body. There should be no evaluation of emotional expressions of others.

g. Reframing—It is the ability to manage the interpretation we make regarding events of our lives. This creates emotionally useful stories as or while the incidents in our lives unfold. If someone says to a lady, “This dress suits you,” her reaction depends on who said that, in which way, with reference to what, where, and other things regarding context. Ambiguity in any communication leads to negative emotions.
An emotionally literate person accepts the responsibility of his or her own experiences. Emotions are kept aside. They know they can control only themselves. If they do not, they will be facing either positive or negative overwhelming emotions. They think in terms of appropriateness of their frame of reference while interacting with others. Reframing is in a way like rationalization, not for justifying the wrong approach, but for developing healthy intentional-ity. Sometimes even when the individual’s intentions are positive, he or she may not have any positive approach in his or her repertoire. One has to understand the interests of both parties and then try to solve the problem.

If two brothers need the same two-wheeler to go out and there is a conflict regarding it, what can be done is first find out the nature of work. If one of them is going for official work and the other is to go to a friend’s house, they can solve the problem by:

a. Inviting the friend to one’s house
b. Taking a hired vehicle
c. Dropping the person and bringing him back
d. Changing the timing of informal work.

This flexibility, creativity, and controlling negative emotions are products of emotional intelligence. Empathy and understanding other’s emotions and perspective help are also its types.

According to Gardner there are different types of abilities to express ourselves. They are: language, movement, visual images, music, and similar other things. To express our emotional reactions, we can write, draw pictures, dance, make different nonvocal expressions such as screaming, and use combinations of various acts.

Our emotions depend on what we think and how we interpret the events. Hence, one should be capable of controlling emotions. If one interprets the world from others’ perspective, then control becomes difficult. Understanding one’s emotions and accepting them like, “I was feeling happy, jealous, or irritated” and also understanding its intensity becomes essential. There are people who think that there are certain things that they do not want to do but they do without their wish. That means they give up and let things happen anyway. Actually, the ideal situation is when the individual is capable of managing his or her moods; irradiating negative thoughts, fears, tensions, doubts, and unwanted ideas; learning how to maintain mental health; keeping optimistic attitude; and concentrating on the task at hand.

**SENSORY ACUITY AND ANCHORING**

If one wants to increase sensory acuity and consciousness about self, one must find out the stimuli playing the role of anchors for arousing different responses. Like a particular type of smell, a particular song, a specific photograph, or some environmental stimulus like rain or wind may be the cause of reoccurrence of a memory, images, emotions, or physical reaction. One may write down all these things in detail like increase in heart rate, tension in neck muscles, etc. After that one has to decide which type of state would be appropriate for such a situation. The basic difference between a naïve individual and an expert is related to this.

Learning to anchor and trigger emotional resource states is, thus, an important skill. First one has to recognize the relationship between emotional ups and downs with changes in voice, breathing rate, speed of talking, and vibration in voice. Then, recognize what changes take place in all these when one becomes angry, bored, irritated, depressed, happy or unhappy, and afraid of something, and what indicators of muscular stress are experienced.
Life Skills for Success

For developing emotional intelligence the following skills are essential:

a. Become emotionally literate. Label your feelings than labeling people or situations.
b. Distinguish between thoughts and feelings.
c. Shoulder the responsibility of your feelings.
d. Show respect for others’ feelings.
e. Use your feelings to make decisions.
f. Validate others’ emotions.
g. Do not advice, command, control, criticize, and judge others.
h. Practice getting a positive value from emotions.

Learning and enhancing emotional intelligence

a. Learn to quickly reduce stress—Like for example, if things are not going on according to your expectations, what do you do? Say if the meeting is delayed and you are wasting your time, do you start blaming others and getting frustrated or become angry? That is not going to help. You should develop an ability to stay calm and control your upsetting tendencies in different situations.
b. Recognize and manage your emotions—Identifying and managing various emotions in any unwanted situation helps a lot.
c. Connect with people with the help of nonverbal communication—Wise use of nonverbal communication really works very well for staying connected to people. It is a must to recognize which type of nonverbal communication is specifically useful for that and intentionally using it again and again so that one develops such habit to create a pleasing atmosphere for self and others. For example, your smiling face may reduce a lot of tension between you and your classmates who may not be very friendly with you.
d. Use of humor and play to deal with challenges in life—Humor can be used for positive outcomes if it is used in a healthy way. We should not make fun of others and their limitations; however, humor regarding self and our own limitations works better.
e. Resolve conflict positively with confidence—Every conflict can be managed positively if we wish to. Everyone has some problems and own perspectives which we may not understand easily; hence, with more efforts we have to accomplish that.
f. Take responsibility of your own action—Many a time, we blame someone else for our wrong decisions and problems that we face due to it. We have to shoulder the responsibility of our own deeds and decisions.
g. Understand how your actions affect others—When we interact with others we do not think about its effect on others. However, it is essential to understand why people behave in a particular way as they do. It gives a direction to our reactions also.

Socialization process that is conducive to enhance emotional intelligence:

a. Secure environment should be provided to children at home and students in schools and colleges. A lot of threatening and punishment, excessive harsh treatment given to children leads to emotional problems. Freedom to understand and express emotions is hampered. The individual should feel free to analyze and evaluate various experiences and to try to achieve stable self-concept.
Emotional Intelligence

b. Care for children is important. If parents and significant adults care for children and adolescents, they also develop a caring attitude. This leads to the enhancement of empathy and general understanding about others’ emotions. It also leads to self-respect among them.
c. Adults should manage their anxiety. Many a time, overexpression of anxiety by adults leads to the introduction of similar negative feelings in mind of their offspring. Hence, open expression of such negative feelings should be avoided.
d. Feelings of children should be accepted and acknowledged. Many a time, parents and teachers do not have enough empathy to adjust their emotional state with that of children. They heavily criticize the young ones and ban their every natural feeling. In such a situation, interpersonal relations and faith disappears. Accepting and acknowledging emotions of children results in a feeling of emotional security.
e. Children should be encouraged to accept and express their feelings. Say for example, when a child is feeling upset, frustrated, or overwhelmed, it is essential to encourage the child to express and accept their feelings. At least after a particular behavior is shown, they should be asked regarding the details of emotional experiences.
f. Adults should show empathy while interacting with children. A lack of empathy on the part of significant adults may lead to serious emotional problems in children. If the experiences of a child are not understood, parents may take things for granted and project their own intentions on offspring.
g. Children should not be trained to repress their emotions. If the psychological distance between parents and their children is too much, children will not share their emotions with parents but try to repress them. As a consequence, emotional catharsis becomes difficult and mental health gets affected.

Researchers have suggested the following activities that are capable of managing emotional upsets in a better way:

- Music and relaxation
- Dance or outdoor play
- Meeting friends
- Shopping or hobbies like reading
- Intrapersonal communication where one motivates oneself

There are some other activities which are less effective though they are considered as direct stress reduction and tension reduction activities:

- Drug and alcohol consumption
- Avoiding the situation or the person that causes a bad mood
- Passive mood management as watching television or movie, eating favorite food, or sleeping

In real life, it is complex and complicated interaction of various skills that decide whether the individual will be emotionally intelligent or not. A person may fail to make good contact with others simply because he or she cannot understand nonverbal cues.
Though criticized by some psychologist due to alternative approaches, emotional intelligence seems to offer useful insights regarding complex emotions of human beings.
Alka Wadkar had a bright career throughout her educational endeavors. She has completed her Masters and PhD in psychology with various awards and scholarships. She is associated with various institutes for differently abled individuals, and other educational institutes. She is a trustee of a college of education and is known for free counseling of differently abled students and their parents. She has a rich experience regarding teaching, research, and socially relevant work. She has taught psychology in the Department of Psychology, University of Pune, for approximately 30 years. She has been successfully guiding research students for PhD, MPhil, MEd, and MA for last 25 years.

Dr Wadkar is known for her socially relevant publications. She has written thirteen books and received seven state-level awards for thought-provoking research-based books written for the laymen. She has written five textbooks for different universities.

She has published and presented 75 research papers in regional, national, and international contexts. She has completed five research projects and has been writing articles for encyclopedias, government publications, All India Radio, newspapers, weeklies, monthlies, and yearly publications for the last 30 years.

Dr Wadkar has been a regular faculty for various academic institutes and government organizations for conducting workshops, delivering lectures, and conducting train-the-trainers programs at organizations, such as Academic Staff College, Extramural Board, Yashada (training institute for government officers), Police Training Center, etc. She has contributed substantially to government programs, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Aanganwadi, and similar other programs for the welfare of women and children. She has been involved in the evaluation work of different universities for postgraduation and dissertations of MPhil and PhD.

Dr Wadkar has been working for the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra for various examinations for the last 22 years.

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