

SOURCE LINES

Mindfulness Meditation and Emotional Intelligence: Enhancing Your 'People Skills'

"WHEN DEALING WITH PEOPLE, REMEMBER THAT
YOU ARE NOT DEALING WITH CREATURES OF
LOGIC BUT CREATURES OF EMOTION."
DALE CARNEGIE

The importance of **emotional intelligence** to success in all aspects of our lives has received a great deal of attention over the past decade. While some of the claims made about this set of competencies, skills and abilities have been overblown, it is generally accepted that when it comes to getting along with others in a manner that promotes healthy, stable, co-operative, supportive and productive relationships, emotional intelligence is a necessary ingredient. **Emotional Intelligence** is often defined by four core abilities. Very briefly these abilities include:

(1) The ability to identify emotions in ourselves and in others, including the thoughts and physical sensations that accompany the emotions. This ability helps us to have greater self-awareness and to "read people" accurately, both which make us better able to convey and express emotions to others in order to communicate more effectively.

(2) The ability to create emotional moods appropriate to specific situations. How we feel influences how we think and what we think about. Thus, the ability to get ourselves and others into the right mood at the right time can be a useful tool for managing co-operative tasks. A serious, slightly negative mood for example, is useful when a task requires us to focus on impor-

tant details that we could easily miss if in a relaxed or happier mood. A neutral mood provides a good frame of mind for being open to and taking in new information. Knowing how to induce these moods is an excellent skill for a leader to have available.



(3) The ability to understand complex emotions, what causes them, and how emotions change from one state to another. This kind of emotional knowledge helps us see other people's points of view. With this ability we understand that emotions are not random events. Instead, they have underlying causes, they change according to a set of rules, and they can be predicted. This kind of emotional knowledge is reflected by our emotion vocabulary and our ability to conduct emotional what-if-analysis. Understanding what is going on for someone emotionally can help guide us in to the more successful ways to support, motivate or encourage individuals or groups.

(4) The ability to manage our own emotions and those of others in a strategic way. People who manage emotions well are able, at appropriate times, to *feel the feeling* rather than repressing it. It also means using feelings in a well thought-out way, rather hiding them or

acting on them without thinking. For example, feeling anger might be a normal reaction in the short-run, but anger that is directed constructively may be more adaptive in the long-run. And the angry feelings, when managed in the right way, can serve as a signal that guides us to behaviour that has no hint of anger.

How Mindfulness Meditation can help increase your Emotional Intelligence

Mindfulness Training provides a way to 'calm' our mind and 'focus' in on the 'moment' to become more aware of sensations, thoughts and feelings.

Through Mindfulness Meditation we can learn how to 'listen' to our own bodies so that we begin 'hearing' what others are communicating to us. We also learn how to 'accept' what we feel and hear without judging or reacting. For instance, you may become more aware of angry feelings you're having towards another person, but the feelings don't overwhelm you and you can 'choose' how to respond to the other person. Imagine the feelings of confidence you experience when you are in control of your feelings as opposed to your feelings being in charge of you!

A Beginning Mindfulness Exercise

- Settle yourself into a comfortable and quiet place where you can practice being 'mindful' without interruptions. Sit back and close your eyes. Take in a deep breath through your nose so that your abdomen fills up first and then exhale through your mouth. As you continue breathing you will begin to relax. Continue to focus your attention on your breathing. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing by saying to yourself 'Breathing in' and 'Breathing out.'
- Next, take your time to remember a situation

when you felt happy or calm. Picture the scene in your mind. When was it? What was going on? Now focus on remembering how you felt. Focus on where in your body you felt the sensation of 'happiness'. Was there a 'lightness' or 'tingling' in your chest? Did you have a sense of energy or peacefulness?

With any luck you've begun to increase your awareness of how your body 'feels' happiness inside. Now, imagine that you are now watching yourself from across the room in this happy moment. What is the expression on your face? What do your mouth, eyes, and body language look like to observers?

This is a beginning exercise that is used to help people start to become better able to identify emotions inside themselves which is a necessary step towards being better able to identify emotions in others. Identifying emotions accurately is a step that can lead to greater empathy and understanding in our relationships with others. The learning needed to develop greater skills in self-knowledge and with others is not like math, computer or literacy skills. It requires modifying habits that are deeply part of us and located in different parts of our brain than where we store and process recipes, birthdates and the route to work. It also involves learning that requires making mistakes and feeling awkward. But, as the saying goes, No Pain —No Gain.

For more information about Mindfulness exercises please refer to the June and September 2006 issues of Source Lines or contact Source Line and speak to a counsellor about further useful information and resources.

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