



Novo Group® Blog

Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life Because EQ is a skill to practice.

When emotional intelligence first appeared in 1995 (Goleman), it served as the missing link in a peculiar finding: people with the highest levels of intelligence (IQ) outperform those with an average IQ only 20% of the time, while people with average IQs outperform those with high IQ 70% of the time. This anomaly threw a massive wrench into what many people had always assumed was the sole source of success – IQ. Subsequent years of research show that other variables explain success above and beyond one's IQ, and the findings now point to emotional intelligence – EQ – as a critical factor.

But what, then, is EQ? EQ is comprised of personal and social competence skills: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. It is different for each of us, and is really about how we accurately recognize and manage our own behaviors, make decisions, and navigate social situations, all with the goal of achieving positive results.

Over the past nearly five years, I have been on my own personal EQ journey. Throughout this time, I have one overarching nugget of wisdom to share with others on their own journey: Emotional Intelligence takes practice. EQ is a skill, and no different than any other skill in the workplace or elsewhere in life, it takes practice, trial and error, and conscious and repeated use and application to see improvement. Athletes practice their sport; makers practice their craft; we too must practice EQ. Following are just three of the ways I have practiced EQ to improve the skill over the years, and what I have learned along the way:

Be curious and inquisitive of others.

I have always naturally been fascinated by people and desire getting to the bottom of what makes each person unique. Noticing the behaviors of others like their body language, tone, and what they say and how they say it has always been a part of my day – and it is part of practicing EQ, too. The thing about really listening and watching others is that you're focused on them – not multi-tasking or diverting your attention elsewhere – something that is even more important in this age of technology and continuous connectivity. Asking questions and seeking to understand has not only put me in a position to better understand others, but I have seen EQ in them, too, and even picked up a method or two to emulate myself. Being in tune with others is really key in social awareness and managing toward better relationships.

Ask for feedback, all the time.

Talking with others and specifically asking for their feedback on interactions with me has been a vital part of my EQ journey. Think about a coach in a sport – golf, for example. I played golf as a teenager, and as I practiced, I couldn't see myself – not my swing or my angle or follow-through – but my coach could. My coach gave me feedback on each of those elements with the goal of improving my game. It's the same with getting feedback related to EQ and how I handle emotions in different situations. Friends, family, and colleagues have all become trusted feedback partners, because as they experience me, they help validate that the experience is what I intended, or perhaps not what I intended. I can then take that feedback and make adjustments in future interactions. One of the important things I've learned through this process: I tend to use my facial expressions to communicate in difficult situations rather than always finding the words to talk through.

Learning from my ‘mistakes’ – and taking the time to reflect on them.

Early in my career, a colleague had ghost-written a letter on my behalf. Upon proof-reading the letter, I reviewed and subsequently marked with a red pen, about 95% of the letter for edit. Not substantive changes, but wording and style changes. I handed the marked-up letter back to my colleague with no further discussion other than “here are my changes”. What I thought was an innocent editing of a letter actually prompted an emotional reaction by this colleague of feeling offended coupled with frustration and annoyance with me; not the makings of a great co-worker relationship. As a result, this colleague didn’t care to interact with me directly, because they associated me with feeling offended, frustrated and annoyed. Upon receiving feedback on this encounter from my manager, I was of course, embarrassed, as that was not my intent. But it is about learning from the situation and moving forward – that’s how EQ skills are strengthened. Now, I genuinely take the time to evaluate my intent in messaging – with colleagues and in personal relationships alike. I’ve practiced this quite a bit over the years, so it happens much more naturally, now, second nature really. A reminder that EQ isn’t about not having emotions, but about using emotions in our interactions with others to work toward a positive outcome.

Not the whole story.

This by no means summarizes my entire EQ journey; they are three of the many examples of the strategies and lessons I’ve learned and practiced along the way in my journey toward better, more successful relationships and interactions at work and at home.

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