

How To Develop Your **Emotional Integrity**

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For over a decade now I have been asking people some simple questions like *“What is the most important thing in your life?”* or *“What do you care about most of all?”*

No matter where in the world I go, the most common answer is always the same. Yes, you guessed it right – Family. Of course, everyone should care deeply about, and do their absolute best to ensure the well-being of one’s family. So when I hear this answer I typically ask them to show me their diary for the last six months. A quick flip through their schedule and it becomes clear in many cases that family has not been their priority. More often than not, people fail the diary test. When confronted with this uncomfortable truth, they justify it by saying their jobs are very demanding, or that they are working so hard only for the sake of the family’s well-being.

Really? The consistency of responses regardless of culture or geography raises an important question – how honest are these responses? And if they are not fully honest, who are the respondents most dishonest with?

For several decades now, emotional intelligence or EQ has been bandied about as the key skill for career success. Researchers have found that people with higher EQs make more money and get promoted faster. The argument is simple: Emotional intelligence is primarily made up of two things – self-awareness and social-awareness. The more aware you are of your own feelings, the higher the chances of you managing your emotions intelligently. The more aware you are of others, the higher the chances of you managing your relationships intelligently. And if you are intelligent about managing



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own emotions and those of others around you, chances are you will succeed more than someone that lives a reactive existence without such awareness and intelligence.

All of this is true. However, if one wants the full benefit of such intelligence - which is to achieve true happiness and fulfillment along with (and not just) material success - one must first meet a key prerequisite: emotional integrity.

Emotional integrity is the courage to acknowledge one’s true feelings, wants and desires without judging them with the societal lens. In essence, it is about being 100% honest with oneself. If one is just emotionally intelligent without being emotionally honest, the benefit will at best be temporary and skin deep.

Unfortunately, most people suffer from low or inadequate emotional integrity, often without knowing it. Here are some common examples:

“I really want to pursue a higher purpose, but I cannot take any risks because of my family responsibilities.” – Or could it be because of lack of personal courage or fear of failure?

“I am compromising my value(s) for greater good.” – Really? Or is it because it is convenient and/or no one is looking? Or could it be that it is not a deeply held value in the first place?

“I hate everything about the relationship I am in but for several reasons I have no choice but to stay in it.” – Or is the fear of being left all alone in the world greater than the pain of the bad relationship?

“I am not succeeding because I haven’t had the lucky breaks many others have had.” – Or might it be because not enough pro-active effort has been made?

“I am helpless because I have no power or authority to change anything.” – Or are the risks associated with challenging the status quo too scary?

“I will pursue what I really want after I have been successful, or after I have achieved financial security for my family.” – Are you clear about what you really want, and what success looks like in the first place?

The list can go on and on. The point is, without honestly acknowledging what one really wants most out of life, true fulfillment may not be possible.

So, how can one develop high emotional integrity? By introspecting deeply about the five most important things one wants in life, and rank ordering them. The exercise sounds easier than it is because for it to be powerful, it requires complete honesty with oneself. For example, if push came to shove, would you choose your own health or your family’s financial security? Or, what is more important and valuable to you – your personal sense of achievement or helping others?

These are tough questions, and there are no universally right or wrong answers. Integrity begins at home; one must first develop laser sharp clarity of what is most important and what s/he wants most out of life. Based on such honest clarity, one can then make choices about focus, actions and behavior. In the absence of emotional integrity too many people spend an entire lifetime compromising and sacrificing, only to regret it at the end of their lives. As Bronnie Ware, an Australian nurse in the palliative care wing of a hospital found out, the top regret of the dying is ***“I wish I had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”***

A life full of compromise and sacrifice does not do justice to any of the varied roles one plays in life. When at work, we feel guilty about not spending enough time with the family. When at home, we constantly worry about work.

If at all we play, our mind is forever pre-occupied by family and/or work matters. In any case, we are never fully present, and before we know it, we end up in our death bed thinking about the top regrets of our life.

It doesn’t have to end up this way. Life becomes a lot more fulfilling and satisfying if one can change his mindset from sacrifices to choices. This transition (from sacrifices to choices) is one of life’s most liberating experiences because one moves from forever feeling like a victim to being empowered. Once empowered with deep clarity about what is most important, one can make the most difficult of choices with courage and conviction. And the primal step towards acquiring such empowerment is to develop the highest possible degree of emotional integrity. Add a bit of Imagineering (see below), and you will be well on your way to true happiness, success and fulfillment.

Going From Victim to Empowered:

1. Honestly list what you really want most out of your life
2. Acknowledge your wants, desires and ambitions without any judgment or guilt
3. Imagineer your life: Imagine what you want to achieve, visualize the impact you want your life to have, and reverse engineer it by making choices rather than sacrifices.