

SELF-CARE SEPTEMBER

Part Three: Raising Your EQ

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What exactly is emotional intelligence? Why is high EQ such a valued attribute? Are there things we can do to raise our emotional intelligence? In Part 3 of Self-care September, you'll find answers to these questions, and a whole lot more!

Since the publication of the ground-breaking book, *Emotional Intelligence*, by psychologist Daniel Goleman in the 1990s, there has been a great deal of talk — complete with misinterpretation, misinformation, and misunderstanding — about emotional intelligence, what it is, and how and why it is important in life. While it is a rightly sought-after quality found in great leaders, emotional intelligence is much more than an attribute that will help you get ahead in business. Our emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of our quality of life, health, and relationships with others.

A definition

Let's begin our exploration of EQ with what might be the clearest and simplest definitions of both EQ and its better-known counterpart, IQ. Our IQ — intelligence quotient — is defined as a measurement of our knowledge of the outer world, how it works, and how we reason with the world and solve outer-world problems.

Take this same definition, and apply it to our inner world, and you'll have an understanding of EQ. In short, our EQ — emotional quotient — is a measure of how well we know and understand our inner selves, our feelings, what makes us tick, and how well we comprehend, and interact with others. EQ is all about the degree to which we understand, relate to, and act with compassion for ourselves and others. In other words, IQ is what we know and understand, and how well we navigate the world around us, and EQ is what we know and understand, and how well we navigate our emotional lives.

A valued attribute

High-EQ individuals are self-aware, and in touch with their feelings. Since they know what makes them angry, upset, or fearful, they are not at the mercy of their negative emotions. They are good at regulating their emotions, and move through life confident that they will conduct themselves well, without losing control. They are able to tune into the people in their environment, empathize with them, and treat them with respect and kindness. This, of course, leads to valuable social skills. High-EQ individuals excel at maintaining strong relationships and making good choices, for themselves and others.

A brief history

Like IQ, EQ is, in part, a process of maturation. Just as we take in knowledge of the outer world, our inner self-awareness, or emotional self, develops over time. During the first stage of life, usually, until the age of 9, our EQ is in what is known as the *preconventional* stage, where our choices are based on exterior factors. Children avoid punishment for doing something 'wrong,' and earn 'rewards' from authority figures like parents, teachers, and coaches who praise and reward children for doing as they are told.

Then, we move beyond the initial preconventional stage into what is known as the *conventional* stage. In this second developmental stage, we have a clear sense of right and wrong. We understand the rules of engagement with others and we know and follow these conventions and laws. In the

third and final stage of EQ development, known as the *post-conventional* stage, there is a strong and nuanced inner moral compass, a sense of right and wrong that functions in concert with compassion for the self and others.

A famous experiment

Twentieth-century psychologist *Lawrence Kohlberg's* famous experiment highlights the differences between various stages of development. In this experiment, researchers told participants from all three developmental stages the story of a desperate man, unable to afford the great expense of a much-needed medication for his dying wife, who stole the drug from a pharmacy. Participants were then asked whether it was wrong for the man to have stolen the drugs. Participants in the pre-conventional stage were unanimous in thinking that the man was wrong to have stolen the drugs. Likewise, respondents in the conventional phase of development, who understand how society works and know the rules, laws, and consequences for breaking the rules, could understand the man's dilemma, but also felt that his actions were wrong. But those in the third stage — where compassion is part of the decision matrix — understood the moral dilemma of the man in the story, and out of compassion for his wife's suffering and his dire circumstances, found him right to have acted as he did.

A shocking reality

While we might assume that all adults reach the third and final stage of development, it is estimated that only 10 to 15 percent of individuals ever reach this stage. Most people remain in the unquestioning, rule-following second stage of development.

Due to poor role modeling and a lack of compassion in their young lives, many people are taught to see the world simply and rigidly in black and white rather than shades of grey. Many of us never learn to see others with

compassion or view situations in nuanced ways. Many people live fear-based lives, in self-doubt that hinders their personal growth and limits their understanding, acceptance, and interactions with others. These limitations often lead to anxiety, depression, poor coping skills, and unhealthy behaviors and habits, like over-indulging in alcohol or drugs, overworking, and other choices that negatively impact their health and quality of life.

What you can do to raise your EQ

Raising your EQ begins with you, getting to know yourself, and your emotions. When you understand what triggers anger and other negative emotions, you can better regulate your actions and reactions to situations and interactions with others. A greater self-awareness leads to an increase in the ability to empathize with and relate authentically to others. An expanded ability to relate authentically to others leads to greater social skills, and greater social skills allow you, at your highest and best, to interact with confidence, in the moment, with compassion for yourself and others. When it comes to raising your EQ, there's no time like the present and no better place to start than with yourself.

Three Steps to Raising Your EQ

Get to know you. *When you understand your own emotions, you become more emotionally intelligent. You'll soon find yourself better at handling any emotional curve balls that come your way.*

Build empathy for others. *The better you get to know yourself, the better you will be able to understand and show compassion for others.*

Think before you act or react. *Armed with self-awareness, and compassion for others, you will soon find yourself considering both your emotions and the feelings of others before taking action, even in difficult situations.*

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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021.

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Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>

