

GILL HASSON

emotional intelligence

SECOND EDITION

A stylized landscape illustration. A large white circle representing the sun or moon is positioned behind a range of blue mountains. The mountains are depicted with geometric shapes and a gradient of blue colors, from light blue at the top to dark blue at the base. The background is a light blue sky with a subtle, darker blue pattern.

Managing emotions to make
a positive impact on your life

Emotional Intelligence

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impact on your life**

Second Edition

Gill Hasson



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For Alba, Oscar, Robin and Jacob.

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Introduction

What is emotional intelligence?

What is emotional intelligence? It's being intelligent with your emotions.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to both understand *and* manage emotions.

It's using your emotions to inform your thinking and using your thinking to understand and manage emotions.

Although regular intelligence – the ability to reason, rationalise, analyse and so on – is important in life, emotional intelligence is the key to thinking clearly and creatively, to being able to manage stress and challenges confidently and relate well to others.

In this book you will learn how to understand and manage your emotions – your own and other people's – in a way that is helpful and can make a real, positive difference to your life.

Understanding emotions

Emotions are part of being human. Whether we're aware of them or not, emotions are a constant presence in our lives, influencing everything we do. Emotions are the glue that connects us to other people and gives meaning to our lives.

Emotions cause us to feel, think and act in different ways in different situations. But emotions can be complicated. This can make them hard to understand; difficult to make sense of and take meaning from.

Understanding emotions involves:

- recognising and understanding the three aspects of emotions – physical states, thoughts and actions – and how they interact;
- being aware of the differences, transition, variations and degrees of intensity between emotions;
- understanding what, how and why you and other people experience certain emotions in certain situations.

Chapter 1 starts you on the road to understanding emotions by looking at the nature of emotions – the inherent aspects of emotions: what all emotions have got in common.

You will see that emotions are made up of three parts: thoughts, physical feelings and behaviour. Any one part of an emotion can trigger and influence another part.

Take, for example, anxiety. Supposing you were anxious about an exam, an interview or a social occasion. Anxiety might start with a thought ('I'm dreading this'), which might trigger physical feelings (stomach turns over, tense muscles, dry mouth) and then behaviour (unable to sit still or relax).

But your anxiety could start with the physical feeling of dread (stomach turning over, etc.), which reminds you of and makes you think about the upcoming exam or social event ('I'm dreading this'), which results in the behaviour of pacing up and down. And, of course, the anxiety could start with the inability to relax which triggers the physical feelings and the thoughts that go with them.

No wonder we so often struggle to understand and manage emotions! Although we do see some emotions as positive, there are plenty of other emotions that we regard as 'negative' or 'wrong'.

However, as you develop your understanding of what, exactly, emotions are and why we have them, you will see that judging emotions as 'positive' or 'negative', 'good' or 'bad' isn't very helpful.

The fact is, *all* emotions have a positive purpose – to keep you safe, to help you make decisions, to develop and maintain social bonds, to experience happiness and creative processes. You can read more about the positive intent of emotions in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 helps further your understanding by looking at *specific* emotions; their levels of intensity, the differences and similarities between them and the relationships between them.

Understanding, for example, what envy and jealousy are: envy is wanting to have something that someone else has got – to feel envy when someone you know gets a promotion. Jealousy on the other hand, is a feeling of *resentment* that another has gained something that you think you more rightfully deserve: feeling jealous of a promotion that you feel *you*

should have received instead of the other person. Knowing the difference between those two emotions can help you have a clearer picture of what you're feeling and why.

You will learn that disentangling what *triggers* an emotion from the thoughts, feelings and behaviour that are part of it can also help you to understand the emotion – and see it as 'just emotion', rather than getting caught up and overwhelmed by it.

Of course, although we all feel and experience emotions, an important part of emotional intelligence is understanding and accepting that emotions are experienced differently by different people. Not only that, different people have different ideas and beliefs about emotions – their purpose and intent and how to respond to them.

Understanding this helps you to start managing other people and their emotions more effectively.

Managing emotions

Once you have a clearer understanding of the nature and purpose of emotions, you are in a better position to manage them.

In Chapter 3 you will learn that managing emotions means drawing on emotions to inform your thinking, reasoning and behaviour.

Managing emotions includes the following:

- Knowing when to respond immediately and when to stop and think.

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- Knowing when to rein in your emotions; when to engage or detach from an emotion.
- Knowing what is, in any one situation, an appropriate and inappropriate expression of emotion – in yourself and in other people.
- Being able to manage other people's emotions.
- Knowing how to draw on emotions to develop empathy and rapport with others.

People with good levels of emotional intelligence know that managing emotions does not mean controlling them; it doesn't involve dominating or suppressing emotions. Instead, managing emotions involves being flexible with your thinking, behaviour and responses; being able to stay open to feelings, both those that are pleasant and those that are unpleasant.

And because we all experience and respond to emotions in different ways, Chapter 3 suggests a *range* of strategies and responses to manage emotions, other people, events and situations. The emphasis is on identifying ways that work for you, personally, to manage emotions and the thoughts, feelings and behaviour that go with them.

By the end of Part 1, you will have understood, then, that emotional intelligence involves both understanding and managing emotions – yours and other people's.

It's a dynamic process; the extent to which you can understand and manage your own emotions influences your ability to understand and manage other people's emotions. And vice versa.

However, emotional intelligence is not limited to specific strategies to manage specific emotions, people and situations.

There is further scope for you to understand and manage emotions – yours and other people's.

Communication skills, assertiveness, a positive approach and an optimistic outlook are key features of emotional intelligence.

In Part 2 we start by looking at how you can develop your emotional intelligence by developing your communication skills.

You will learn that good communication is an inherent part – a permanent and inseparable element – of emotional intelligence. How come?

Communication between people involves expressing thoughts, ideas, opinions, feelings and emotions. It involves making sense and meaning; understanding each other, what we each think and feel. And we all know how hard that can often be!

Chapter 4 will help you become a better communicator – it will give you insights, ideas and plenty of tips and techniques on how to 'read between the lines' and get a better understanding of what others are thinking and feeling.

It's not difficult – you simply draw on the natural ability we all already have to understand someone else's experience, their point of view, their thoughts and feelings. Even when their experience, perspective and feelings differ from your own.

This ability is called empathy. And while we all have the ability to empathise, it's an ability that can be improved in easy, straightforward ways. How? Simply by observing, listening and asking questions.

How, though, you might ask, can you better express *your* thoughts, opinions, feelings and emotions? By knowing how to assert yourself. Again, assertiveness is an integral part of emotional intelligence. Chapter 5 explains that just as emotional intelligence involves being able to understand and manage your feelings, so does being assertive.

Assertiveness calls for you to express thoughts, opinions and feelings in direct, honest and appropriate ways while at the same time taking into consideration the other person's opinions, feelings and needs.

Again, this chapter has plenty of advice and easy to follow techniques that you can use to help you to be more assertive. Don't worry if the thought of saying what you feel, think, want and don't want makes you anxious; I encourage you to start small and explain how you can practise being assertive in low-stakes situations. Once you feel comfortable in these low-risk situations, you will feel more confident to move on to other issues and situations, little by little.

And as your confidence improves, so will your emotional intelligence.

Good emotional intelligence, like all skills, is also helped if supported with a confident, positive approach and attitude. Having a positive outlook does not mean ignoring or suppressing difficult emotions or ignoring the challenging aspects of life. Chapter 6 explains that positive thinking allows you to approach difficult emotions and situations in an appropriate, helpful way.

With a positive approach, you acknowledge feelings such as jealousy, disappointment, guilt and so on, but rather than let

them drag you down into a spiral of negative thinking, you know that these emotions have positive intentions. You know that events, other people, yourself and your emotions can be better managed with a positive attitude.

In fact, you even find that as a result of a positive mindset difficult emotions like regret, irritation, frustration and disappointment are less intense and make fewer appearances! You see life as filled with possibilities and solutions instead of worries and difficulties.

In Part 3, we turn to specific situations where emotional intelligence can make a big difference to the outcome.

These situations include occasions when you experience and need to manage anxiety, anger or disappointment. I also explain how to manage and support someone else who is struggling with these feelings.

You will get a better understanding of emotions such as anxiety and worry, disappointment and anger. You'll notice that the same features of emotional intelligence – assertive communication and positive thinking – arise throughout.

Often, difficult emotions are managed by sticking with one emotional response, whatever the situation is.

However, our emotions control us when we assume there's only *one* way to react. You will see we have a choice – we can identify and use strategies that work for each one of us according to the situation, other people and so on.

Emotional intelligence is not only about understanding and managing *difficult* emotions. The last chapter of this book

focuses on engaging the ‘feel good’ emotions that motivate and inspire people.

When there’s a specific goal that you want someone to achieve – or they themselves want to achieve – you need to *motivate* them. Motivation is what prompts and drives us to do and achieve something.

When you want to spark and enthuse someone to do something, you need to *inspire* them. Inspiration is what fills a person with an animating, exciting influence.

Whether you want to motivate or inspire, the emphasis is on engaging their heads and their hearts; their logic, reasoning, imaginations and emotions. Chapter 11 explains how to do this.

Why emotional intelligence matters

Understanding and managing others’ emotions is essential to your social wellbeing; your interactions and relationships with other people. The ability to pick up on and respond to others’ emotions in appropriate ways can help you to live and work with others more easily.

Understanding and managing your own emotions is essential to your *personal* wellbeing; your mental and physical health.

It’s easy for many of us, with so many competing demands and commitments, to feel overwhelmed with life; to spin into confusion, isolation and negativity. Improve your emotional intelligence and you improve your ability to understand and manage your emotions. You can think more clearly and

creatively; manage stress and challenges, communicate more easily with others; and display trust, empathy and confidence.

Better emotional intelligence – understanding and managing emotions – can help you to lead a happier life because acting rationally and calmly in difficult situations can, in time, become second nature.

You will be in a better position to handle a range of circumstances, events and other people that in the past you've found difficult or stressful.

By understanding your emotions and how to manage them, you're better able to express how you feel, what you want and don't want, while at the same time acknowledging and understanding how others may be feeling. This allows you to communicate more effectively; to talk with and understand others and forge stronger relationships, both in your personal life and at work.

Emotional intelligence at work

You've probably noticed that it's not the smartest people that are the most successful or the most fulfilled in life. You've probably noticed that being clever, talented or skilled is not enough. How well you do in your career may well depend on how well you get on with your colleagues, manager and clients.

Experience or qualifications might get you the job, but it's your ability to manage other people and your interactions with them that will keep you there and enable you to enjoy and progress in your work.

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Emotional intelligence can help you manage office politics and navigate the social complexities of the workplace. And when you've cracked that nut, you're well positioned to manage a range of social situations!

Be patient with yourself as you learn to improve your emotional intelligence. As you read this book, simply pick out a few ideas, tips and techniques that appeal to you and try them out. Be prepared to take a few risks. If, despite your efforts and best intentions, a situation doesn't turn out as you had hoped, reflect on how you could respond differently in a similar situation next time.

That's being emotionally intelligent!

