

Emotional Intelligence by Goleman

A 16-Minute Summary Part by Part

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Learn how to become an emotionally intelligent leader in our summary of Daniel Goleman's iconic book "Emotional Intelligence."

We, humans, are the smartest species on our planet. We created science and art; we learned to fly and reached the Moon; we fought diseases. Yet, besides our rational side, there is one more part of us— illogical and even dark. This is the sphere of emotions.

We deal with emotions all the time. However, it's not always possible to explain why we feel in a certain way, and what we're supposed to do about it. Sometimes, we act like blind kittens, and it doesn't help us in life – with family and work, let alone with our health. So do we just have to take it as it is?

No, not really. In his book "Emotional Intelligence", Daniel Goleman explains that emotions can be studied, and people can be taught how to understand and manage their own emotions. This book was written in 1995, and since then, the term "emotional intelligence" (as opposed to IQ, which stands for "intelligence quotient") has become widely known and accepted, in academic circles in particular.

So what is emotional intelligence and what's its role in our lives? Let's shortly go over each of the chapters of the book to learn about it.

Part 1. The Emotional Brain

1. What Are Emotions For?

The name "homo sapiens", which is Latin for "wise man", places an emphasis on our thinking abilities. However, Goleman says the value of IQ is overrated in human life. Emotions often overwhelm reason, and there is an evolutionary logic behind it.

Our emotions have a very long history: we genetically inherited emotional neural circuits developed throughout the lives of 50,000 human generations. And even though the last 10,000 years were marked by a rapid rise of civilization, they didn't impact our emotions that much.

Roughly speaking, the emotions we have now are the same emotions our very distant ancestors had. As a result, Goleman explains, "We too often confront postmodern dilemmas with an emotional repertoire tailored to the urgencies of the Pleistocene".

People, however, have grown to have two minds – the emotional and the rational. The reason is the neocortex, the center of thought, which is bigger in humans than in other

species. Thanks to the neocortex, we can analyze our feelings and ideas – and we can have feelings about feelings.

However, the neocortex doesn't govern our emotional life. In “emotional emergencies”, it's the limbic system that takes charge.

2. The Anatomy of an Emotional Hijacking

Emotional hijackings are short periods of emotional explosions, like extreme rage, that happen before the neocortex, our thinking brain, gets a chance to analyze the situation. They happen to us very often, not only with negative emotions involved. It can be an outburst of laughter or intense joy. The reason is the amygdala – a part of the brain that Goleman calls “the seat of all passion”.

What the amygdala does is scan every situation for trouble. We ask ourselves if this is going to hurt us, and if the answer is yes, the amygdala sends an urgent message to every part of our body – and drives our rational brain. As a result, we often simply cannot control our emotions; we're just propelled to action.

This is why emotional intelligence is just as important as IQ, says Goleman:

The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart.

Part 2. The Nature of Emotional Intelligence

3. When Smart Is Dumb

Academic intelligence doesn't prepare us for life's challenges. Technical skills are important, but without emotional intelligence, they don't make a difference. Research showed that 1940-s students with high IQs didn't achieve much more success in their adult lives as compared to their peers with lower IQs, and weren't much satisfied with life overall.

So what is emotional intelligence? Psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, the formulators of the theory of emotional intelligence, provided an elaborated definition, that included the presence of the following factors:

1. Self-awareness – the ability to recognize emotion as it happens.
2. Managing emotions.
3. Motivating oneself.
4. Recognizing emotions in others.
5. Handling relationships.

4. Know Thyself

Self-awareness is being aware of your mood and thoughts about it. Even though recognizing emotions doesn't equal to changing them, mere recognition is still the first step to handling emotions. To put it differently, recognizing that you're angry can help you get out of anger.

According to Mayer, there are different styles of dealing with emotions:

Self-aware: these are the people who know their emotions. They're typically in good psychological health and positive, and if they're in a bad mood, they don't ruminate about it.

Engulfed: these people are helpless with their emotions; they're not sure what they feel and have little control over their emotional life.

Accepting: these people are aware of their feelings but don't do anything to change them.

There are also people who have trouble engaging with or identifying their feelings at all – this is called alexithymia. Of course, people with alexithymia do experience feelings, they just have challenges expressing or explaining them.

5. Passion's Slaves

Extremely intense feelings are rare for us: most people just fall into the gray middle range, and occasionally get on an emotional roller-coaster. We should also remember that negative emotions are just as good as positive: as Goleman ironically notices, "being happy all the time somehow suggests the blandness of those smiley-face badges that had a faddish moment in the 1970-s."

The design of our brain means that we have little or no control over what emotion we feel and when. Yet, we can decide how long this emotion will last:

- **Anger.** To calm it down, you can either try to seize the thought that provoked it, or physically get away from the person – go to another room, for a walk, or to work out.
- **Anxiety.** The first step is to admit you've got worrisome periods. The next one is to ask yourself: what is the probability that the dreaded event will happen?
- **Melancholy.** There are two things to do: challenge the ruminating thoughts and schedule pleasantly distracting events.

6. The Master Aptitude

In one of the experiments, four years old children were given a choice: get one marshmallow now, or two marshmallows after a short period of time. Years later, these same children were tracked, and it appeared that those who had willpower were more socially competent and “able to cope with the frustrations of life.”

Why so? Because the children had the skill of reading social situations. They knew that waiting extra time would bring them benefits – in their case, one more marshmallow. Later in life, they knew that delaying impulses was the root of efforts, like staying on a diet or getting a degree, that would lead to a specific result.

Positive thinking and optimism, just like putting satisfaction off, are very important to emotional intelligence: they mean you’ll not get depressed or too anxious in the face of challenges.

7. The Roots of Empathy

The ability to know others’ feelings is an essential capacity that is widely used in different areas – in romance and parenting as well as politics. And an important thing to remember here is that 90 percent of an emotional message is expressed nonverbally: through the tone of voice, gestures, and so on.

People are born with the ability to [empathize](#). A couple of months after birth, babies react to the emotions of others as if they were their own: they start crying when they see other babies crying.

This is why it’s important for parents to stay in tune with their babies’ feelings. For example, if a baby is crying, a parent could gently rock the baby back and forth, as a way of showing the baby they know what it feels.

On the contrary, the absence of attunement has a negative impact on children. If parents ignore their tears and need to cuddle, children will stop expressing feelings, and in some cases even stop having them. This, in turn, lowers their ability to empathize, so important in adult social life.

And while emotional neglect ruins empathy, the effects of an abusive attitude are much worse:

There is a paradoxical result from intense, sustained emotional abuse, including cruel, sadistic threats, humiliation, and plain meanness. Children who endure such abuse can become hyperalert to the emotions of those around them.

The explanation is simple. Children become oversensitive not to miss a sign that could mean a threat.

8. The Social Arts

In dealing with others, we use different social competencies that help us communicate. The inability to use them can make an intellectually bright person seem arrogant and even obnoxious.

There are several ways in which we express our emotions:

1. **Minimizing the show of emotion.** For example, in Japanese culture, people are supposed to hide their feelings of distress in the presence of authorities.
2. **Exaggerating.** When a six-year-old dramatically frowns.
3. **Substituting.** In Asian cultures, it's impolite to say no, so they say yes (and it's a false yes).

We learn how to apply these display rules very early. Our emotional intelligence depends on how well we learn these strategies.

There is also such a thing as emotional contagion. We “absorb” others’ feelings and then feel the same way. For this reason, teaching a child to react in a particular manner is futile if parents do the opposite. We transmit moods and, naturally, when two people interact, the person who is more active will be the one who transmits his mood, while the passive one will be the recipient.

This ability – to move people’s feelings – is very important to be an influential leader, says Goleman:

Setting the emotional tone of an interaction is, in a sense, a sign of dominance at a deep intimate level: it means driving the emotional state of the other person.

Part 3. Emotional Intelligence Applied

9. Intimate Enemies

For American marriages that started in the 1890s, the divorce rate was 10 percent. For those who married in the 1950s, it was 30 percent, and for those who married in the 1990s... 67 percent. The reason for this is the erosion of social pressure. This means that emotional intelligence is crucial for those who want to stay together since society will no longer force couples to give each other a second chance.

First and foremost, boys and girls (the author is talking about heterosexual couples) are taught different ways of how to handle emotions. Typically, parents are more willing to discuss emotions (apart from anger) with their daughters rather than their sons. Consequently, men tend to be less educated about their emotional life.

Numerous studies have confirmed that on average, women are more empathetic than men, and it's easier to read their emotions from their faces. Such an upbringing though

has a very negative effect on men – learning to minimize their emotions, they have to deal with fear, guilt, and vulnerability (with a poker face, by the way).

But what does that mean for relationships? It means women want to talk, and men don't understand them. In fact, men tend to be more "Pollyannaish" about their marriage, seeing things in a better light than their wives, so they often genuinely have no clue what women want from them.

Disagreements will be present in any case, says Goleman, but what matters is not disagreements themselves but how couples handle them.

10. Managing with Heart

Now let's take a look at the world of work. Many executives think that work demands them to use heads, and not hearts. They are sure that being emotional with people will make it impossible to make tough, yet right decisions.

However, emotional competence is a very useful skill in the workplace. Think about it, it will enable you to handle conflicts before they escalate. This is especially useful for leaders, since, as Goleman points out, "leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal.

According to Goleman, there are three differences the application of emotional intelligence makes:

1. The ability to air grievances as helpful critiques. A company is a system, and feedback is "the lifeblood" of the organization. Without it, people are ignorant of their performance. And negative feedback is also needed.

However, leaders often put it off – they simply don't know how to give it correctly. A common form of negative feedback is the phrase "You're screwing up" – and this is the worst type of motivation, as it clearly shows the person who is saying that doesn't care for the feelings of those who receive it.

But there is an alternative to giving negative feedback. Consider the advice given by psychoanalyst Henry Levinson:

- Be specific - focus on what's been done well, what poorly, and how that can be changed.
- Offer a solution - a person may not see it.
- Be present - provide feedback face-to-face.
- Be sensitive - think of what impact your words may have.

2. Dealing with diversity. Individual biases may remain, but organizations must develop tolerance, says Goleman. Emotions of prejudice are formed back in childhood, and it's not really possible to get rid of them – but it's possible to change your intellectual beliefs and act accordingly.

Just putting people from different groups together doesn't work. What does though is zero tolerance. It starts with naming a bias, then continues with speaking out against the smallest signs of harassment or discrimination.

3. Organizational Savvy and the Group IQ. Nowadays the number of “knowledge workers” – those who work as market analysts, programmers, or writers – has drastically increased. Their expertise is highly specialized, and for them to be effective, they must be coordinated as a team. After all, a writer is not a publisher. This is a thing worth keeping in mind for leaders.

There is also such a thing as group IQ, the sum total of those involved. But what matters for the group's success, says Goleman, is not the academic IQ, but emotional intelligence.

Read more about how to manage with heart: [How to Overcommunicate Effectively as a Manager](#).

11. Mind and Medicine

There seems to be a problem in medical care. Very often, when medical personnel attend to the physical condition of a patient, they ignore his emotional state. But facts are facts. Stress suppresses immune resistance, and some emotions are toxic. This is why it makes sense to change this approach.

There is a lot of evidence that confirms the value of this idea. Chronic anger and anxiety make people more susceptible to various diseases. Depression doesn't make people more vulnerable, but it impedes medical recovery.

So how can emotional intelligence be brought to medical care? There are several ways.

Patients may be provided more information to make decisions about their own medical care. Before surgery, they could be given pre-surgery instructions on how to handle fear and anxiety. It would be great if their psychological needs were attended to as well. In other words, if a doctor or a nurse could give some comfort, that would be very helpful. These simple things can make a huge difference.

Part 4. Windows of Opportunity

12. The Family Crucible

Everything parents do will have a lasting impact on their children. This is why emotionally intelligent parents can be a great benefit for a child, says Goleman. At the same time, emotionally illiterate parents will cause a lot of harm.

There are three parenting styles used by emotionally inept parents:

1. **Ignoring feelings altogether.** When children are upset, their parents take it as a bother.
2. **Being too laissez-faire.** They see how a child feels but don't intervene emotionally; they bargain and bribe children to make them stop crying.
3. **Showing no respect for how the child feels.** They're harsh in criticism and punishments, and they may forbid any display of anger or irritation.

There is much evidence that academic success highly depends on the emotional characteristics formed before a child goes to school. These characteristics are confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness – the things that determine if a child is ready to learn. And they are formed by parents, so it's better if they know what they do.

13. Trauma and Emotional Relearning

PTSD, which stands for post-traumatic stress disorder, is a mental health condition caused by a traumatic event, the memories of which are very intense. As Dr. Dennis Charney pointed out, victims of a devastating event may never be the same biologically.

The brain begins to change only if a person felt there was nothing he could do to prevent the horrible event. If a person has even a minor control, he will do much better.

So what can be done to relieve the trauma or to get rid of it? You can reeducate your emotional brain, says Goleman.

The first step in healing is creating a feeling of safety, and helping patients understand that their nightmares are PTSD symptoms. The next step is reconstructing that experience in the context of safety. This way, the emotional circuitry acquires a new response to the traumatic memory. One way to do it is through art. For example, children who couldn't talk about the incident could express what they felt through drawing.

What happens then is that memory gets transformed, as well as its effects on the emotional brain. Trauma memories get associated with safety rather than terror.

14. Temperament Is Not Destiny

Can temperament, which is a biologically determined emotional set, be changed?

Jerome Kagan, a psychologist at Harvard University, did a study. For decades, mothers would bring their infants and toddlers to his laboratory. Some children were playing with others without hesitation. Others were shy, quietly watching others play. Over the years, none of the outgoing children became timid, and two-thirds of the timid children stayed reticent.

The good news is that there is still a chance to change your destiny. Kagan made a conclusion that a protective strategy on the parents' part backfires as children get deprived of the opportunity to handle the situation by themselves. While those children on whom parents put some gentle pressure were able to change.

Our brain is not fully formed at birth. It shapes itself throughout our whole life, even though this process is most intense in childhood. The neuronal connections which are less used get lost, and at the same time, we're able to form new ones. Childhood is a window of opportunity for shaping our emotions, so some emotional management from parents would be very useful.

Part 5. Emotional Literacy

15. The Cost of Emotional Illiteracy

In one of the studies, researchers compared the emotional state of American children in the mid-1970s and at the end of the 1980s. The assessment of parents and teachers showed that things got worse, even though they couldn't find any specific reason. Children had more social problems, preferring to be alone and being dependent. They felt unloved. They were too nervous to concentrate and daydreaming too much. Finally, they were more aggressive.

This is a global phenomenon, says Goleman. It was brought about by global economic processes. Parents started to work longer hours. Children got left to their devices. Many infants got to be left at daycare, and run very poorly. The result can be as bad as juvenile delinquency.

And the reasons can be different – biological destiny, poverty, family issues, or all of them at the same time. Yet, emotional deficit adds a lot to a child's risk. Not getting enough attention to their emotions, children grow into emotionally illiterate adults. So what can be done about it?

16. Schooling the Emotions

The answer is – emotional literacy should be introduced into schools as a subject. The classes won't bring immediate results. It will take time, even years, to be able to handle

your own emotional life, because those practices must be deeply ingrained into your mind. And there are objective evaluations that can help rate the behavior.

The main criteria for emotional literacy are:

1. **Emotional self-awareness:** improvement in recognizing and naming emotions, the ability to understand what caused the feeling.
2. **Managing emotions:** less aggressive and self-destructive behavior, the ability to express anger more appropriately.
3. **Harnessing emotions productively:** more responsibility and self-control.
4. **Empathy:** the ability to read others' emotions.
5. **Handling relationships:** more cooperation and sharing, better at solving relationship problems.

As we can see, emotional intelligence is more than important for a healthy and successful life. It's a basic life skill, and it should definitely be taught and developed, the sooner the better. The social benefits it brings, like taking another person's perspective and empathy, make our life fuller – and also contribute to a healthy society, because pluralism and mutual respect are the basics of democracy. Hopefully, the importance of emotional literacy will be recognized even more widely in the near future.