

EXCLUSIVE: Building emotional intelligence – where do you start?

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New Delhi: There are many instances where we meet someone, who might not be exceptionally bright or talented but are doing great in life. They get along really well with others and are happy and content themselves. The credit for their sorted and blissful life, despite having to deal with numerous things on a daily basis like all other people, goes to their high levels of Emotional Quotient (EQ). Numerous researches show that people with high EQ have better career success, health, relationship satisfaction and leadership skills.

With an increase in awareness, people are recognising the importance of Emotional Intelligence in leading a happy and balanced life. A person that has high EQ is able to understand, interpret, and respond to various emotions and situations. They will be able to interpret if someone is angry or upset and react appropriately to control the situation.

However, there is debate whether one is born with a certain level of EQ or it can be learned and improved like other skills. **Dr. Sanjeev P. Sahni**, a renowned psychologist and behavioural expert reveals it is possible to improve one's Emotional Quotient.

“A 2012 study found that undergraduate students who were given an emotional intelligence and emotional self-efficacy intervention that consisted of just four classes improved in perceiving and managing emotions long-term. These results suggest that a conscious effort to pay attention to emotions can result in the development of emotional intelligence,” shared Dr Sahni.

HOW TO IMPROVE ONE'S EQ?

Below are some easy steps shared by Dr Sahni, that can help us improve our EQ levels.

Being self-aware

The first building block of emotional intelligence is understanding your own emotions. Consistent self-reflection on feelings and behaviours allows you to manage your reactions to stressful situations.

Countering cognitive shortcuts

Cognitive shortcuts are automatic thought patterns that people use to make decisions, especially in time-sensitive and stressful situations. While these shortcuts make our brains more efficient, they harden over time and may result in incorrect or unhelpful information processing.

Typically, the same triggers cause the same responses repeatedly. Thinking about what your triggers are and whether they bring up emotions that create faulty responses can help you deconstruct them and work towards developing healthier behaviours. For example, if you are aware that waiting for friends who are late makes you angry, you will be aware of this tendency the next time it occurs and will be able to consciously calm down.

Slowing down your reactions

Slowing down your emotional reactions is a helpful tool to change the trajectory of a difficult situation. The first step is to identify your reaction and take a step back to approach it more objectively.

Next, if possible, remove yourself from the situation, even if it is just for a short while. Give yourself space to take a walk or breathe while you evaluate your next steps. This is when you challenge your thoughts. Think about whether your instinctive reaction is going to help you. Then, choose how you want to respond and return to the situation.

By breaking down challenging circumstances, you develop the emotional intelligence to handle them effectively rather than fall back on your cognitive shortcuts.

Being socially aware

To develop your social awareness, consciously utilize your senses to gather information. Use what you see, feel, and hear to understand body language and facial expressions. While this is often an automatic process, trying to notice others' thoughts and relationship dynamics helps increase emotional intelligence.

Connecting with empathy

Empathy is a crucial component of emotional intelligence. You can use empathy in conversation by -

Asking questions about how they feel and the impact it has on them.

- Putting yourself in their shoes but not assuming that you know exactly what a situation is like since an assumption may alienate them. You can say things like "I imagine that would feel..." instead of "this is..."
- Trying not to relate with everything they say or bring up personal examples.
- Active listening – The practice of deeply paying attention to what a person says which allows for developing new perspectives, finding solutions, and compromise.

Using these techniques, you'll be able to develop your emotional intelligence to not only succeed at work but to improve the relationships in your personal life too!