



# MINDFUL EMOTIONS

How to Use Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life

by ANITA BAROT, MFT

**H**ave you ever said something you later regretted — to your boss, a colleague or a loved one — because you let your feelings commandeer your mouth? If this sounds familiar, you’ve experienced how easy it is to make poor choices when emotions get the best of you.

Have you ever been shocked to discover you’ve hurt someone’s feelings and can’t figure out how? If so, you know that sometimes it’s difficult to gauge how other people are feeling and that what you say and do can impact others in surprising ways.

These common scenarios highlight the importance of emotional intelligence, or EI, which is, really, a type of human art. It’s a useful art, an

applied art, and one that benefits us more as we practice it.

Renowned psychologist Daniel Goleman, author of *The New York Times* bestseller *Emotional Intelligence*, considers it twice as important as IQ when it comes to success in academics, interpersonal relationships and professional lives. There’s a strong chance that you won’t reach the success you want in life without emotional intelligence.

What does EI look like? Those with high emotional intelligence are adept at managing their emotions. They’re skillful in reading the emotions of others, and they are experts in self-awareness, empathy and the cultivation of social relationships.

Excellent emotional intelligence is a tall order, so you might be wondering, “Is EI really something that can be learned or improved?” The answer is yes — you can improve your EI through practice, by asking for feedback from others and through self-reflection.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

At the base of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. Self-awareness is looking at yourself, both in terms of your inner world and of how you impact the world around you. It is the ability to think critically and reflect on what is working and what is not working.

## 5 FOUNDATIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1. **Self-Awareness:** know yourself and understand your inner world.
2. **Self-Regulation:** regulate your behavior so that you do not do something that you regret.
3. **Motivation:** work hard and be passionate about what you do.
4. **Empathy:** put yourself into someone else's shoes.
5. **Social Skills:** work out conflict, inspire others, and lead individuals so they want to follow you.

To be self-aware, you must know your strengths and weaknesses. Strengths are activities that make you stronger. What do you look forward to? What is satisfying after you have done it? Which activities make you lose track of time?

When you reflect on your strengths, it helps you to recognize what you should continue to do because it brings out your best. Strengths are not necessarily activities that you are good at; you can still be driven even you are not good at something. If you can focus on doing activities that *strengthen* you, you can make your performance great.

Self-awareness also means knowing how different situations affect you — what makes you anxious, what excites you, what saddens you, what makes you happy — and *why* you might feel a certain way under certain circumstances. Equipped with these “whats” and “whys,” you can better figure out how to regulate your emotions.

For instance, if you procrastinate, then your self-awareness will help you recognize a few things: one, on which tasks you tend to procrastinate; two, why these tasks are difficult for you to complete on time; and three, what you need to do — perhaps start earlier on the tasks you dislike to avoid feeling irritated when you fall behind.

Finally but equally important, self-awareness calls for you to know the internal cues in your body and

understand how they correlate to your emotions. For example, if I am quiet in a group, I may feel insecure about my ideas.

## IMPROVING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Some people are born with more natural emotional intelligence than others. But, unlike IQ, which is believed to be a stable trait, emotional intelligence can be developed.

Let's say you have a habit of taking on other people's work because you want to be liked. The emotion behind this common pitfall is probably fear of abandonment. After years of shouldering the work of others, you're exhausted and you're now determined to function with firmer boundaries. To exercise your EI in this case, you can ask important people in your life to help you practice saying no. Ask them for feedback.

Over time, it will be easier to say no, and you will recognize that you are still liked, even when you aren't bending over backward for people all the time. Better still, when you starve your fear of abandonment, you're likely to find that people will not run away from you just because you set healthy boundaries; instead, they will respect you. That shows emotional intelligence is something you can strengthen through repetitive exercise, just like building muscles.

## USING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Now that we have an understanding of the foundations of EI, let's look at some examples of everyday situations in which EI comes in handy.

### POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS

With U.S. President Donald Trump now in office, many friendships have dissolved over political differences. Such disagreements can make it surprisingly hard to feel close to a friend or loved one. This might be a familiar situation:

*Your friend has voted for Trump and you voted for Hillary Clinton. You can't understand why your friend could make this choice, which seems completely against everything you stand for, and you aren't sure if this friend is really your friend or someone who has deceived you. What can you do?*

If you find yourself in this predicament, you'll experience emotional pain because you care a lot about your friend; on the other hand, you might find your friend's opinions hard to swallow. This lack of acceptance can lead to upset and to questioning the validity of the friendship.

Try to show empathy by asking questions. You might say, “Can you tell me more about why you feel this way and what made you lean in this direction?” The point shouldn't be to try to convert your friend to your way of thinking. Instead, seek understanding of his or her motivations. If you use your EI to keep your feelings at bay, you can focus on empathizing with his or her viewpoint (even if you really don't agree with it). Doing so can help you find compassion and love for your friend, despite the differences in opinion, and might even save the friendship. If his or her stance proves

too difficult for you to stay friends, then remember to share your feelings in a respectful way. Acknowledge that although you are traveling different paths, you have valued the time you had together.

### WORK CONFLICTS

Here is a hypothetical work scenario requiring EI:

*For the last six months, you have noticed that one of your colleagues is rude to you and seems to say negative things to others about your work. You feel like this person is waiting for you to fail, and being around him or her is a thorn in your side. It is hard for you to focus because you feel like he or she is undermining your efforts at doing your job. Which aspects of EI come into play here? And what is the (emotionally) smartest thing for you to do?*

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# Relationships

If you're operating with low emotional intelligence, you might yell or write an angry email. If things are very out of hand, you might feel compelled to quit your job, which is a bad — but probably avoidable — outcome.

When you are dealing with conflicts at work, choose to self-regulate. Self-regulation, another element of EI, is the ability to select how you want to act when you approach a situation.

First figure out how you want to deal with the situation. You could either approach your colleague directly, or go to a supervisor and seek mediation. If you take the matter into your own hands, engage with the colleague. Note that he or she seems upset and ask, gently, where this anger might be coming from. When you are speaking, focus on only discussing your feelings; make no accusations. You can use social skills to understand the situation and to show your colleague that you would like to resolve it.

If there is resistance, it is important for you to remain motivated despite how you're being treated. People at work will likely recognize that the coworker is acting badly and that you are rising above. Your emotional intelligence can be put into action: Try not to let your emotions get the best of you. Focus on doing the best job you can.

## MARITAL CONFLICTS

Here is an example of an escalating domestic argument, the likes of which you have probably witnessed:

**Spouse A:** "I have an event tomorrow evening, so I can't go with Sarah to the park."

**Spouse B:** "Why don't you help out with Sarah and do things that you promised me that you would do? You are so unreliable, and I'm tired of all the disappointments."

**Spouse A:** "Well, I'm tired that you are always telling me about the things I don't do!"

**Spouse B:** "I can't help it if you don't do anything!"

**Spouse A:** "You don't do anything, either!" (*Leaves room and slams door*)

Spouse B is upset because Spouse A seems not to want to do anything for their child. Spouse B feels unappreciated and overburdened, and Spouse A feels like it's pointless to do anything because it won't be appreciated anyway. Here we have two partners who both feel unrecognized but in different ways, and both of them have acted with low emotional intelligence.

What is lacking from each partner? Empathy.

Empathy does wonders for your relationship because it is usually reciprocal: If you show empathy to your spouse, your spouse is more likely to show empathy to you. The result of empathy in marriage is peace, and, as a bonus, empathy also increases the chances of getting your needs met. If married couples used more empathy and EI in their communication, they'd feel understood, recognized, fulfilled and a lot happier.

Before beginning a difficult discussion with your spouse, know first what you are feeling and what outcome you would like. After stating what you feel in the most productive way possible, outline specifically what you need. (Spouses tend to forget that husbands and wives might be best friends and confidants, but they are not mind readers; that is why it's so important to continually communicate your needs.)

Let's now look at a rewrite of the scene that incorporates more

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emotional intelligence:

**Spouse A:** "I have an event tomorrow, so I can't go with Sarah to the park."

**Spouse B:** "Since your event is in the evening, is it possible for you to come back in the afternoon for a few hours? Sarah really had such a good time with you last time, and she was looking forward to it."

**Spouse A:** "I'm free in the afternoon, so I could come home a little earlier before I have to go out."

**Spouse B:** "That would be great. I have been feeling tired, so it will be nice for me to do something relaxing while you are with Sarah. Thanks so much."

**Spouse A:** "Sure." (*Smiles*) "You deserve a break."

In this example, Spouse B reacted with emotional intelligence and asked for compromise in a way that made the other partner feel valued. By showing empathy, the conversation went smoothly and both partners' needs were met in the end.



As you improve your EI, you'll gain the resilience and emotional stability required to help you become a better leader, a more compassionate friend, a more loving partner, and a calmer person. Instead of being afraid of failure in your relationships, you will look to these experiences as chances to grow and take risks. In all aspects of life, improving your emotional intelligence means increasing your chances for great success, personal growth, and inner happiness.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Barot is a licensed marriage and family therapist with over 10 years of experience counseling individuals, couples, and families. Anita has partnered with Connecting Founders and Andragogy to create "Leading Forward," a series of workshops on effective negotiation, communication, and other soft skills required for success. Anita will be conducting workshops in Bangkok on Emotional Intelligence I: Self-awareness, Self-management, and Motivation on March 12<sup>th</sup> and Emotional Intelligence II: Empathy and Social Skills on March 18<sup>th</sup>. To learn more or to register for courses, visit [www.lotustherapy.com](http://www.lotustherapy.com) or email [info@lotustherapy.com](mailto:info@lotustherapy.com).