

Boost Your Emotional Intelligence

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Can you improve your Emotional Intelligence by plowing your driveway? I think so, and I will explain a fascinating analogy later in this article. I read a recent book on Emotional Intelligence by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves entitled *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. If you have not been exposed to this book, perhaps my article will whet your appetite to purchase it.

The authors start out by giving a single sentence definition of Emotional Intelligence (which is abbreviated as EQ rather than EI, and proves that whoever invented the acronym did not have a high IQ). Emotional Intelligence is "your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships." This leads to a description of the four quadrants of EQ as described by Daniel Goleman in 1995.

1. Self Awareness - Ability to recognize your own emotions
2. Self Management - Ability to manage your emotions into helpful behavior
3. Social Awareness - Ability to understand emotions in others
4. Relationship Management - Ability to manage interactions successfully

The book contains a link to an online survey that lets you measure your own EQ. This is an interesting exercise, but it lacks validity, because people with low EQ have blind spots as described by Goleman. You might rate yourself highly in EQ when the truth, in the absence of blind spots, is somewhat lower. Still it is nice to have a number so you can compare current perceptions to a future state after you have made improvements.

Most of the book consists of potential strategies for improving Emotional Intelligence in any of the four quadrants described above. You get to pick the quadrant to work on and which strategies (about 17 suggestions for each quadrant) you think would work best for you. The approach is to work on only one quadrant, using three strategies at a time for the most impact. The authors also suggest getting an EQ Mentor whom you select. The idea is to work on your EQ for six months and retest for progress, then select a different quadrant and three appropriate strategies.

The most helpful and hopeful part of the book for me is where the authors discuss the three main influences on performance: Intelligence, Personality, and Emotional Intelligence. The observation is that it is impossible to change your IQ (Intelligence) and very difficult to change your Personality, but without too much effort, you can make huge progress in your EQ.

The trick is to train your brain to work slightly differently by creating new neural pathways from the emotional side of the brain to the rational side of the brain. This is where plowing your driveway comes in. We are bombarded by stimuli every day. These stimuli enter our brain through the spinal cord and go immediately to the limbic system, which is the emotional side of the brain. That is why we first have an emotional reaction to any stimulus. The signals have to travel to the rational side of the brain for us to have a conscious reaction and decide on our course of action. To do this, the electrical signal has to navigate through a kind of driveway in our brain called the Corpus Callosum.

The Corpus Callosum is a fibrous flat belt of tissue in the brain that connects the right and left hemispheres. How easily and quickly the signals can move through the Corpus Callosum determines how effective we will be at controlling our emotions. This is a critical part of the Personal Competency model as described by Goleman. Now the good news: whenever we are thinking about, reading about, working on, teaching others, etc. about EQ, what we are doing is plowing the snow out of the way in the Corpus Callosum so the signals can transfer more easily. Translated, working with the concept of EQ is an effective way to improve our effectiveness in this critical skill.

After reading the book, my awareness of my own emotions has been heightened dramatically. I can almost feel the ZAP of thoughts going from the emotional side of my brain to the rational side. Oops, there goes one now!

Given that roughly 60% of performance is a function of Emotional Intelligence, we now have an easy and almost-free mechanism to improve our interpersonal skills. I hope you will go out and purchase this little book, particularly if you are a leader. For leaders, EQ is the most consistent way to improve performance and be more successful.

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