

# Emotional Intelligence . . . . .

Every once in a while, I find a book that seems to answer for me many social issues. Such a book is Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman, Bantam (USA) and Bloomsbury (UK). It warms my heart to know that others feel the same way about it. It is a bestseller!

Emotional intelligence is the measure of a person's ability to recognize emotions in oneself and others and to express and respond to emotions in a suitable manner. They call an extreme lack of emotional intelligence alexithymia - one who cannot describe or relate to their feelings. For example, they know they are sweating, but they can't name the emotion causing their discomfort. The movie "*Good Will Hunting*" points this out with the lead character being an emotionally illiterate genius. The other extreme is someone "who is present and mindful, whose emotions are under control, who is always cheerful, optimistic and never fazed by setbacks, who is empathic, caring and compassionate. In Buddhism, it is the Bodhisattva, in Christianity it is the saint, in Judaism it's the Hasidic rabbi."

To paraphrase Daniel Goleman's book, there are the five points to emotional intelligence.

- 1 ) Self-awareness - knowing what is going on in the moment, recognizing and naming our own emotions.
- 2) Handling disturbing or afflictive emotions well, so your emotions don't run you. This involves a choice.
- 3) Motivation - maintaining focus and energy and working toward your goals. Being optimistic in the face of setbacks and not seeing them as the result of some flaw in yourself, but rather of changing conditions that you can do something about.
- 4) Empathy - knowing what other people are feeling and because you resonate with them, spontaneously caring about them. We could describe empathy as the psychological root of compassion; if you don't have empathy, your version of compassion will be wooden, cold and without spirit.
- 5) Social skill - handling emotions in other people well, and at the same time it's the key to persuasion, cooperation and harmony in groups.

Children who do not know how to differentiate between their emotions and how to name their feelings, become what our society calls "emotionally maladjusted." This term replaces the judgmental non-descriptive tag "delinquent." Goleman states these examples: "girls 10 or 11 often confuse their feelings: not knowing the difference between anger, anxiety, loneliness and hunger are more likely to develop eating disorders in adolescence. Boys of 7 or 8 who are impulsive and angry are 3-6 times more likely to commit violent crimes than other children. Impulsive, angry girls of

7 or 8 are about 3 times more likely to have an unwanted pregnancy."

New Haven in Connecticut is the first school district to bring Emotional Literacy onto their curriculum. They did it because they were absolutely desperate. Goleman in an interview for View magazine states "Many of the kids in New Haven are born to single, teenage mothers on welfare, who were themselves born to single teenage mothers on welfare. It has the highest rate of pediatric AIDS in the country, which means that almost every school kid knows someone who is dying of Aids, or is related to someone with AIDS, or may have AIDS themselves. It's a disaster zone for kids."

"In the New Haven programs, children in the youngest grades get basic lessons in self-awareness, relationships, and decision making. In first grade students sit in a circle and roll the 'feelings cube,' which has words such as *sad* or *excited* on each side. At their turn, they describe a time they had that feeling, an exercise that gives them more certainty in tying feelings to words and helps with empathy as they hear others having the same feelings as themselves.

"By fourth and fifth grade, as peer relationships take on an immense importance in their lives, they get lessons that help their friendships work better: empathy, impulse control and anger management.

"In every classroom in all New Haven schools there is a poster of a red, yellow and green stoplight (traffic light). This poster tells children that whenever they are upset and might be about to do something they shouldn't, they should remember the Stoplight. (Page 276)

*Red Light:* Stop, Calm down, and think before you act.

*Yellow Light:* Say the problem and how you feel  
Set a positive goal  
Think of lots of solutions.  
Think ahead to the consequences.

*Green Light:* Go ahead and try the best plan.

"Beyond the management of feelings, it points a way to more effective action. And, as a habitual way of handling the unruly emotional impulse - to think before acting from feelings.

"The teachers/coaches present this as the united front. When a child comes in the principal's office, it's not "I'm sick and tired of seeing your face in my office" he says, "'Let's go through the Stoplight, i.e., the emotional outburst turns into a learning experience for children.

# • • • • • and the Masks We Wear

If we don't learn these skills as children, they are much harder to learn and relearn as an adult. Signs of emotional illiteracy which prevail in our communities are road rage, wife battering, gang wars, child murderers, teen suicide. How do we become emotionally literate and bring civility to our streets and caring compassion to our communal lives? And what does this have to do with clowning?

We work with children in a fun environment which is very conducive to learning. Kids will remember what a clown says or does often for the rest of their lives.

Whatever you make fun of, you need to be able to do it well first. A rodeo clown really knows his way around a rodeo. You can't clown on a tight rope until you are an expert tight rope walker. Because we are "fools of the heart" we need to really know, name and identify our emotions. As caring clowns, we move in a world where emotions are intense, so we need to be experts of the emotion.

## **ENTER THE CLOWN!**

Teaching children how to recognize emotion from facial expression could be incorporated into your routine. You know how kids love naming colors, especially when the clown can not. The same can be played with the emotions. Am I happy (your face and body show sadness) etc.? With very young children and those who may be developmentally challenged, you need to tell them a situation containing the emotion. "Oh boy! I got a chocolate ice cream cone and I was so happy. (You show anger). I've done this with doctor, staff and parents playing along.

Maybe it's the teacher in me, but we clowns have a great opportunity here. Many children have never learned how to read expression. From Goleman's book "Bullies very often will perceive neutral faces as hostile faces, usually because they come from families where they are physically abused, and when their parents wear a neutral facial expression the child may get whacked. These children then misperceive children around them and see them as threatening. They don't see themselves as bullying others, but quite simply as defending themselves -- these are the children that need to understand, this is a neutral face and this is an angry face."

Who can teach a facial expression to kids better than a clown? How about silly expressive face cards where you say "This guy is really angry (the face is happy)." You might even explain what you are doing to staff and/or parents.

As for our own emotional intelligence, I think we need to deepen and expand our clowning when we become caring clowns. There is more at risk. We as clowns put our vulnerability out on the high wire. When we walk into a dying or suffering person's room there is risk, but there is the sharing of emotions. There must be empathy. With continued effort to understand others, we build our compassion.

Goleman continues: "The brain shapes itself through repeated experience. Anatomically, the centers that control or regulate our emotional abilities continue to develop into adolescence, so if you can help children to get it from the beginning, you are setting them straight for life. But the brain continues to shape itself throughout a lifetime.

If *IQ (Intelligence quotient)* is the measure of the ability to understand and make relations with the outside world (material world), and *Emotional Intelligence (we could call it EI)* would be the measure of the ability to name, cope and interrelate emotions, so how about *Spiritual Intelligence (let's call it SI)*. That would be the measure of the ability to be open to the infinite possibilities of consciousness and relate to the world with compassion.

– Shobi



Teenagers "in mask" from Bruce Marrs' Community Youth Theater Group.