



# Step up: Integrating emotional intelligence with professional practice

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Dr Moss recently delivered a CPD to Society members on emotional intelligence (EI), as it is key to one's success in any role. Dr Moss presented a sequence of practices, each validated scientifically, that can be applied to develop EI and overall wellbeing.

## Life can be hard, sometimes very hard.

If you are anything like the majority of people, you may have read many articles, watched many videos, or listened to many people offer advice on how individuals can enhance their wellbeing. You might have read or heard about how you can manage your stress, develop your resilience, or boost your motivation.

But yet, despite all this advice, most people do not feel quite as fulfilled as they had hoped. Most people do not skip along the road, singing “If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands”, while smiling incessantly. The mental health exercises they attempt, from meditation to positive thoughts, seem to improve their lives only fleetingly or marginally.

Fortunately, if individuals can develop two habits, their wellbeing is more likely to improve enduringly and appreciably.

## *So, what are the habits you need to develop and how can you really enhance your wellbeing?*

**First**, you need to embrace activities that elicit a blend of positive feelings and negative feelings at the same time, called ambivalent emotions. You might, for example, deliberately choose to pursue stressful activities or challenging adventures—such as assert a contentious opinion in public or attempt an unfamiliar sport. You might write about the lessons you learned from a traumatic event in your past. You might acknowledge your faults and limitations to other people, honestly and candidly.

All these activities evoke a combination of positive emotions and negative emotions simultaneously. Challenging adventures elicit a blend of anxiety and excitement. Reflections about traumatic events foster a feeling of sadness but hope. A disclosure of personal faults can evoke both shame but also relief.

And, whenever people experience these ambivalent emotions, their life tends to improve gradually over time. They are often more resilient in response to challenges and complications. They become more creative, unearthing novel solutions to lasting problems. They feel more content and joyful.

### *So, why do ambivalent emotions improve wellbeing?*

According to one theory, positive emotion and negative emotions tend to activate distinct circuits in the brain. When people experience positive emotions and negative emotions at the same time, these distinct circuits are activated simultaneously and tend to complement one another.

For example, feelings of dejection tend to enhance the capacity of people to formulate plans. Feelings of contentment tend to enhance the degree to which people are attuned to their values. A blend of dejection and contentment, therefore, enables people to formulate plans that resonate with their values. The individuals become more inclined to pursue their plans. They are thus more likely to accomplish their goals.

The **second** habit you should develop is to choose activities that seem vital to your future. Sometimes, people appreciate how their life and activities now are relevant to their future aspirations. These individuals, consequently, are more inclined to refrain from activities that could damage this future. They will, for example, tend to abstain from unhealthy activities or irresponsible behaviour, like substance abuse, problem gambling, or physical inactivity, for example.

Instead, they will gravitate to behaviours that could benefit their future. They will develop their skills. They will improve their qualities. They will even perceive criticisms and obstacles as opportunities to cultivate these skills and worries. They will thus embrace these challenges, manifesting as resilience and fortitude.

In contrast, on other occasions, individuals feel their future seems vague and uncertain. They are not sure of how they would like their life to unfold—

which roles they would like to pursue or which aspirations they would like to achieve. They cannot imagine their future vividly. This future image of themselves seems like another person, like a stranger.

On these occasions, individuals are not as willing to sacrifice their pleasure now to benefit this future—this stranger. These individuals, therefore, live an unhealthier lifestyle. They often behave irresponsibly. They tend to reject, rather than embrace, criticism and feedback.

Fortunately, you can readily learn to choose activities that seem vital to your future. A range of exercises and activities have been shown to achieve this goal. To illustrate, on every second or third day, over several weeks, record some events you enjoyed, goals you achieved, or people to whom you are grateful. In addition, record two or three of your strengths or talents—such as skills you have mastered or knowledge you have acquired. Second, →

while clenching your left hand for several minutes, contemplate the aspirations you would really like to achieve—or the life you would like to lead—over the next five to ten years. This unusual exercise has been shown to help individuals clarify the future they would like to pursue.

**Third,** develop a list of skills or qualities you would like to develop—and, in particular, skills or qualities that might help you achieve these aspirations. Every week or so, formulate plans on how you will progress, even if only gradually, on these skills or qualities. You might decide to read 4 to 6 articles a fortnight or to practice a skill for 3 to 4 hours a week. You might attempt to integrate these pursuits with your daily tasks at work or at home. You should also consider the precise time, location, or setting in which you will pursue these goals.

These activities might not seem especially novel and surprising. But, if you practice these activities, you will learn to elicit ambivalent emotions and undertake activities that seem vital to your future

aspirations. Consequently, your motivation will gradually rise. Your resilience will improve. And your life may start to resemble the dreams you had envisaged. ■

**DR SIMON MOSS** is the Associate Professor in Psychology at Charles Darwin University. His primary research interest concerns how characteristics or organisations and societies, such as inequality of income or instability of jobs, influence the neural functioning and ultimately the mood, creativity, intuition, engagement, honesty and altruism of individuals. He has published several books and articles in the fields of personality, motivation, integrity, perception, attention and stress. Dr Moss was a co-founder of Zenith professional Development, a company that has collated every scientific discovery that contradicts prevailing management beliefs and practices. Using this database he developed a tool that identifies misconceptions in management. In addition, Simon has presented training programs that are designed to redress these misconceptions.

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## OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 6 & 7 FEBRUARY 2020

