

Why people don't develop EQ or use it at work.

From the blog of the Emotions and Behaviors at Work
organization--Brentfield Consultancy Ltd.



When Daniel Goleman introduced the concept of Emotional Intelligence to the world in the early 1990s, it seemed to provide the answer to why people with average IQs outperform those with the highest IQs 70% of the time. Decades of research now point to EI at work as one of the critical factors that sets “high flyers” apart from the rest.

Yet, almost always, leaders and teams think the *issue is somebody or something else* rather than their own Emotional Intelligence. Many want their **leaders** to be different – less critical or more understanding. Or leaders want their **staff** to be different – to buy in to their ideas and respond positively to change. They say things like: “*they don't respect me*”, “*they don't work as hard as me*”, “*he doesn't make good decisions*” or “*the management are out to get me*”.

So, why don't people use or develop their Emotional Intelligence at work? A team of researchers led by Timothy Wilson from the University of Virginia carried out a series of research studies that could explain why.

Wilson and his colleagues were interested to research people's aversion to contemplation. They noticed that in general, people would rather do something—play with their mobile phones, watch TV, or surf online—than spend time with their own thoughts. They wanted to find out how badly people wanted to avoid thinking.

In the six studies they conducted, the team recruited hundreds of students to spend up to 15 minutes in a bare room just to think and entertain themselves with their thoughts.

Afterwards, participants were asked about their experience. More than half said that they had not enjoyed the experience. The results were the same when (1) participants were asked to allot some time to think in their own homes, (2) when they were given the time to prepare pleasurable fantasies, and (3) when a random sample of adults in a community were tested.

In the final study, Wilson and his team asked the participants to spend 15 minutes with their own thoughts. They were told that they could press a button to *give themselves a shock* any time within the period.

Prior to the start of the experiment, all of the participants had stated that they would rather pay than get the shock. Data showed, however, that 67 per cent of the men pressed the button at least once while 25 per cent of the women did so during the period of contemplation. It seemed that for these participants, getting a shock was much better than spending the whole 15 minutes with their thoughts!

The key to successfully developing Emotional Intelligence is taking time for self-reflection and building self-awareness.

It sounds easy to develop your self-awareness, but the research of Wilson et al. suggests that most people find it uncomfortable to spend time focusing on their own thoughts and feelings.

Plus, developing self awareness is only the starting point for Emotional Intelligence. Having the motivation to **actively do something** with that awareness is being Emotionally Intelligent.

Wilson's research makes it appear that many of us find it too uncomfortable to self-reflect and focus on our own thoughts and feelings to develop EI skill.

However, if you **want to develop** Emotional Intelligence, here are some quick tips to start the process:

- **Invest in EQ assessments** that provide a straightforward and easy structure for people to quickly get feedback and develop their awareness of theirs and others emotions and behaviors at work.
- **Make space in your diary or journal and set aside a few minutes each day to reflect about how you are feeling.** What happened to make you feel that way? How are your emotions impacting on your own and others' performance? Take confidence that the more you develop this habit, the easier and more satisfying it becomes.
- **Take time to focus on others' emotions and behaviors** - emotions are highly contagious, so when others are feeling or expressing negative emotions they can quickly trigger a potentially destructive emotional response in you if you aren't paying attention. So make the effort to become more attuned to the emotions of those around you, to enable you to consciously respond to them rather than just instinctively react.
- **Learn to take "time out" with a few deep breaths** - research has found that it can take as little as five seconds of conscious deep breathing to short circuit a 'neural hijack' which occurs when the primitive and reactive part of your brain (the Amygdala) overtakes the thinking part of your brain and triggers a fight-flight-freeze response. **Even better, when time and the situation permits, is taking a short walk** outside for a quick 'time out.' Shifting your external physical environment can help to shift your internal emotional one. **Self-reflection and self-awareness are no longer in the realm of new age philosophy. And although people may find it difficult, this is a crucial aspect in developing Emotional Intelligence, in order to be able to understand others and ourselves better, and be more successful in the workplace.**

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*Based on the research of: Wilson, T.D., Reinhard, D., Westgate, E., Gilbert, D.T., Ellerbeck, N., Hahn, C., Brown, C., & Shaked, A. (2014). **Just think: The challenges of the disengaged mind.** Science, 345 (6192), 75-77.*