

## 2 Getting to Know Our Minds Better

### 2A2 Lesson — Avoiding Harmful Reactions to Emotions

Safely controlling how we deal with anger in the heat of the moment is one of the most difficult, yet important EQ skills to learn well. This lesson teaches a powerful, yet relatively simple way to prepare for healthier reactions to anger and frustration in the future. Practicing the techniques explained in this lesson provide a valuable protective insurance policy to have subscribed to, when we are in the midst of unavoidable frustrations and anger.

#### UNDERSTANDING ANGER IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

Emotional intelligence requires us to accept healthy and sometimes difficult behavioral composure. Controlling how we deal with anger in the heat of the moment safely is one of the most difficult, yet important EQ composure skills to learn well. Defusing potent angry feelings when they emerge can require specific understanding about our minds and still be tricky.

The emotional pain of anger can sometimes compare somewhat to the physical pain we feel from a cut through our skin. Even if it isn't serious enough to need stitches, it can still cause intense pain for a while. As children, we learned to withstand the pain of minor cuts, rather than react by crying or fussing; knowing the damage is slight and the pain will soon subside. Unfortunately, it can often be more complex to recognize the level of seriousness causing the pain of anger. This can make it difficult to know when it is more helpful to withstand the pain, rather than aggressively express our immediate feelings.

Hopefully, you've already read lesson "2 A1 Journals Improve Self-Awareness". One of the questions, among others listed to ask ourselves daily is: "What frustrated, angered or bothered me today?" By journaling this particular question each day, we learn to reflect on stressful experiences days later in an insightful manner —after the heat of the moment has passed. This particular question is meant to bring closer attention to the tendency of our mind's stress gauge to malfunction and initially overreact. Because the mind can too naturally carry an overreaction into conflict, we recommend in early EQ training, to apply a more reserved practical approach.

#### A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO DIFFUSING ANGER

In this lesson, we will share with you a technique we've found extremely helpful to defuse anger in the actual *heat of the moment*. The following activity teaches a powerful, yet relatively simple way to prepare you for future stress from anger and frustration. This technique should improve your chances of reacting in a more emotionally intelligent manner when these potent feelings emerge. You will be creating a daily reminder sheet we call an "*Anger Extinguisher*"

To begin this activity, read through the following instructions thoroughly. Then, at the top of a sheet of paper, write the following statement.

*Remember, if I wait rather than comment or react too quickly, I have time to rethink what I will say and do – and have time to consider a more diplomatic response.*

Leaving a space or two after the statement, write a list of PEOPLE with whom you would not want to unintentionally hurt or unknowingly strain your relationship. The list should include everyone you encounter, even the grocery store clerk and mail carrier.

On the top of the BACK side of the paper, note this reminder:

*Remember that keeping an emotional intelligent composure when angry is very difficult, yet is important to heighten my EQ. A major difference from IQ is that EQ can involve accepting healthy and sometimes difficult behavioral composure.*

Leaving a space or two after the statement, write a list of the kinds of THINGS that offend or anger you. Your list can refer to things other people do to you or things that just happen to you or to other people that bother you. It may take some time to complete a thorough list; don't be concerned with completing it your first try. (Perhaps you'll only be reminded of some people or particulars you need to list when you repeat related experiences.) Of course, all this can be done on a computer file, as well.

To increase the chances of this "Anger Extinguisher" becoming an effective tool, it is important to review it once each morning and once each evening with CONCERN and PURPOSE in mind. (It should take only a few minutes.) By reviewing the information daily, there is a good chance that thoughts of this list could come to the forefront of your mind when angry feelings emerge. Remembering this "Anger Extinguisher" and its purpose can improve your odds of remaining calm or at least withstanding immediate pain, instead of reacting harmfully.

Without such a review, it can be much more difficult for any of us to remember and challenge habitual, unhealthy ways we can naturally be too prone to react. If it doesn't work the first time you have to deal with a frustrating moment, don't give up! It may take longer than you think to make such a radical, but helpful change to a long-term habit.

By remembering to avoid harmful reactions, you also avoid serious repercussions that you may not consider or even realize exist when you are in the heat of the moment and susceptible to over-react. Briefly reviewing this information each day can be an inexpensive yet very protective insurance policy when you are in the midst of unavoidable frustrations and anger. With a helpful daily reminder of the importance of defusing potential harmful reactions, you have a better chance to consider a more emotionally intelligent approach.

## **CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO CRITICISM**

Sometimes situations suggest criticism would be helpful. However, it is crucial to do so constructively by following healthy guidelines. Constructive criticism requires being concerned about being objective and yet clearly identifying and communicating a suggested change. It helps us be more tolerant of one another when we consider that we are all susceptible to error and don't easily realize the adverse affects we can have on others. How many criticisms have you experienced or know of that distanced or dissolved personal and/or professional relationships?

Diplomacy tells us it is good practice to be cautious to not emotionally distance or totally alienate the person or group being criticized. These are healthful concerns for you to have in most any life situation; whether you are addressing issues with loved ones, casual friends, acquaintances, employees, employers, businesses or other associates, the news media or even those you consider possible enemies.

Criticism can have an emotionally devastating impact. It can have ill effects on a person's self-esteem, if not *given* with encouraging due care and *taken* in a healthy way. It is just as important to structure a *critique* with a beginning, body, and closing as it is to do so in writing a letter, an e-mail, general conversation, or giving a speech. It is important to remember that in most cases, the opening and ending comments of a critique should be complimentary. If you find yourself feeling the need to suggest a change in another person's behavioral, please consider the following, as well:

## HEALTHY CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

1. Just listening, as you converse, with the intent to approach the other person's behavior constructively, allows you time to acquire more information and to scope the scenario from a more emotionally intelligent perspective.
2. In most instances, it is of value to wait until a later date to voice criticism. Not many situations equate to being a person's only chance to voice concerns. The delay allows you time to devise a more diplomatic approach.
3. Before you will see or speak to the person again or during the balance of your time with the person, search for POSITIVE characteristics, traits, or specific actions worth complimenting. Take note to later write down these positive points.
4. Rehearse speaking some of these strengths compassionately to assure you will open your critique on a positive note.
5. Then address the body of your evaluation—what you distinguish as awkward, a problem, or for some other reason grounds for a critique. It is best to healthfully approach a situation from a prescriptive healing standpoint, rather than in a way that antagonizes the situation even further.
6. After sensitively presenting the body of your critique, close by adding another uplifting statement or reemphasizing the strength you mentioned in the beginning.
7. It is INAPPROPRIATE in most situations to critique a person in front of others. Anything that could embarrass an individual should be addressed in private—and again, it is important to apply a complimenting opening and closing.

## IN CONCLUSION: Attending to Our Emotions Healthfully

Whether you are dealing with an emotional splinter or a full blown emotional stab in the heart, the best responses can be important to know—if you are to save a relationship from becoming infected or outright dying. It is important to deal with the level of seriousness with appropriate composure.

Sometimes, we just need an emotional first-aid kit. Yet other times, we need the equivalent of medical doctor or surgeon to deal with emotional situations that cause serious anger or frustration. In these kinds of situations, please consider seeking the help of a psychological counselor. These days, the knowledge counselors have to heal us emotionally can compare, somewhat, to a medical doctor's knowledge to heal us physically—and they can be our best resource when we are dealing with serious emotional wounds. In the beginning of EQ training, it is best to practice being more reserved than assertive until learning or knowing enough about how to be assertive in a diplomatic manner.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Remember at this point to continue reading through Lesson 3 group, if you haven't previously done so, before beginning the suggested activities.