

## 2 Getting to Know Our Minds Better

### 2A Lesson — Journals Improve Self-Awareness

“Knowing thyself” has been taught for centuries by philosophers as an important key in leading a wholesome life. The journaling questions listed in this program are designed to help you become more self-aware, and thus, get to know thyself better. Answering the questions in this lesson can help to reduce frustrations and make your daily experiences more emotionally fulfilling. They are among many self-observation questions to be explored in our program.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Journaling and other activities presented in this lesson are designed to help you get to know your mind better in emotionally meaningful ways. To ensure that you’re working from the necessary educated standpoint, be sure you have read Lesson 1A and 1B and are following the instructions and guidelines given there.

#### GETTING TO KNOW OUR MINDS BETTER: Where to Begin

Trying to understand our minds better is an ambitious and honorable initiative. It’s also a most valuable one! With proper training, our efforts can contribute significantly toward improving our emotional well-being, as well as our relationship with the outside world.

The emotional intelligence movement began with the timely introduction of the ground breaking book titled *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, by Daniel Goleman in 1995. In Goleman’s book, he highlights the research of psychologists Peter Salovey of Yale University and John D. Mayer of the University of New Hampshire.

In their research into the emotional dynamics of the mind, Salovey and Mayer confirmed that emotional growth occurs through our intellect. They also confirmed that certain dynamics are necessary to promote higher standards of emotional and intellectual behavior. Salovey and Mayer’s findings distinguished the importance of identifying, understanding and managing emotions. They defined their concept as *emotional intelligence*. On page 43 of Goleman’s book, Mayer and Salovey structure emotional intelligence into five main domains. They are explained below, with our expanded explanations parenthesized:

#### 5 Main Domains

1. Self-awareness of one’s emotions- (knowing our emotional shortcomings and strengths.)
2. Managing emotions- (Controlling unhealthy thoughts, comments, and actions.)
3. Motivating oneself- (Effectively coaching ourselves to deal with difficulties.)
4. Recognizing emotions in others- (Attuning to other’s emotional feelings and signals.)
5. Handling relationships- (Understanding how to interact healthfully with others.)

#### IMPROVING SELF-AWARENESS

Our program is designed to help improve your EQ in all five domains. This lesson focuses on the *self-awareness* domain, distinguished as the foundation upon which further emotional intelligence can most easily be built. The best way to begin understanding our own minds better, emotionally, and improve our EQ, is by participating in activities that help us become more self-aware.

The importance of self-awareness is not something new. It is a term we use today that has implied “knowing thyself” for centuries. Philosophers have stressed it as an important key to a wholesome life. Yet how many people over the centuries do you think truly learned how to get to know themselves well enough to lead wholesome, well-balanced lives? Perhaps the problem has been that we just haven’t learned enough about how to “get to know thyself better” to really get to know ourselves well.

Learning how we really are, as individuals, is about improving our self-awareness. It requires us to objectively pay attention to how well our minds are operating by monitoring the quality of our thoughts, communications, and behavior. To improve self-awareness, thus, involves observing our emotions in actions and recognizing how effectively we are managing them as well as building clearer understanding about our emotional strengths and weaknesses, overall.

Such a task is difficult for anyone without specific guidance. Even though the most distinguishing characteristics we have to our existence are our qualities and our ineptitudes, not as many of them are naturally self-evident or as memorable to us as we might think—especially our ineptitudes.

The reason self-awareness is considered to be a foundation of emotional intelligence is because it helps us define what we really need to know about ourselves to improve our lives, emotionally. Learning to observe our emotions in action and recognize how effectively we are managing them is important to our well-being. With quality direction and genuine intention to try to understand ourselves better, we can begin to recognize how important “knowing thyself” truly is to our overall health and the quality of our life journey.

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

In this lesson, you will start learning what to specifically look for to improve your self-awareness and how to accumulate related data. This *directed* kind of self-observation empowers our sense of rationale and helps us engineer our minds and our lives much more cautiously. It can have a profound influence on how well we deal with our emotions, as well as how meaningfully we affect other people and things around us. Such direction can help us get to know ourselves better than we can otherwise even imagine. The more we learn to quantify the emotionally meaningful aspects of our daily lives, the more it can help us improve the other four domains of emotional intelligence.

Without understanding what to look for and how to accumulate data, we can (believe it or not) be far less accurate about how we perceive ourselves. We can too easily compose distorted perceptions—even to the point of structuring an overall inappropriate rating of how emotionally intelligent we are. Collecting data in a way that provides a broader perspective requires a formulated measuring process. Although personally, it is rarely considered, such a process is required in just about every profession imaginable in one form or another.

A big part of the process involved in increasing self-awareness and revealing the important overall EQ picture could be compared to the bookkeeping direction necessary to quantify a business’s financial picture. Without knowing what details to measure and how to appropriately measure them to become more self-aware—structuring an overall accurate rating of our EQ would be about as impossible as trying to quantify a company’s financial statement without knowing how to identify and structure the details involved.

## **INVESTIGATING IMPORTANT CRITERIA DAILY**

The journaling questions outlined in this lesson are part of our formulated process that measures a bigger picture of YOU and your life. Most answers, when combined with others, reveal accumulative ways we learn more about ourselves, not possible otherwise. Noting your answers to these questions and reviewing them frequently provides a healthy starting point to practice what we call *self-monitoring*. It defines an intentional kind of close attention we can give to our thoughts, communications and behavior that improves self-awareness.

**1. What were the highlights of my day?** It's amazing how much more of a month's activities and experiences can be remembered by noting brief reminders of them each day. In seven days, we suggest you transfer the best of your daily highlights to a list of weekly highlights; at month's end, keep the highlights you wish to remember and title this list as January, February, March, etc.

By noting these brief "remembrances" monthly through the years, it becomes possible to build a more thorough and interesting memoir of one's life. This is similar to the value of keeping a memorable photo collection. It also helps one practice regularly defining meaningful activities and experiences.

**2. What frustrated, angered or bothered me today?** Asking this question each day and reviewing your answers at the end of the week can help you to better discern what is worthy of frustration and complaints, as well as what is not worthy or as worthy as you thought. The time lapse helps any of us to recognize how our level of stress can be higher in the moment than it should be about our complaints and frustrations.

From this daily reflection, you can learn that it is often a healthier approach to just try to take these potent emotions in stride and deal with them more calmly. If you find from such daily notation that your mind is exaggerating bother, it can help to reduce such exaggerations in the future and even help you avoid such situations. This can be a real stress reducer!

**3. What am I grateful for and encouraged about today?** This question can help you keep your emotional balance, especially when things seem to go awry. When you think about it, there may be a lot more things to consider than you realize, to provide you with an answer to this question.

**4. What did I do today that might have inconvenienced or offended another person?** Too often it's hard to find fault in our own actions toward others. This question forces you to reflect on the possibility that you may have said or done something offensive toward another person and not realized it without such reflection. This question can help you pay closer attention to others feelings as you consider your thoughts and actions.

**5. What did I tell others today that I would do?** Noting answers to this question helps to ensure that you will remember to do what you said you would do when you said you would do it and not cause others unnecessary stress.

**6. What have I borrowed from someone today that I need to return?** Noting answers to this question helps to ensure that you will remember to return what you borrow and reduce other's frustrations with you.

**7. What did others tell me that they would do or borrow from me today that I need to remember?** By answering this question and reviewing it timely, you ensure that, if necessary, you remind others who need to follow up with you to do so.

**8. What did I learn about myself today that I didn't realize before?** This question can help you keep track of the new things you're learning about yourself and your mind. You can then review your answers regularly to monitor your growth in self-knowledge.

## **BEGINNING A JOURNAL**

Write or type each of the questions at the top of its own page. Your journal can be on the calendar sheets included with this lesson or just on paper or a computer file. Throughout the day, note possible answers. At day's end, notate your brief answers on the journal pages. If you use the calendar sheets provided, use one side of each sheet with 31 lines to answer one question and the other side with 31 lines to answer another. Be sure to date each entry and continue to journal for at least four weeks.

This is the first of several groups of questions we will, from time to time, have you explore and note answers daily for at least a month.

**See: Journaling Calendar**

## **ASSESSING YOUR ANSWERS**

The questions listed here are about matters of emotional stability and respect for others. Yet, how many of us consider asking these kinds of questions of ourselves without such prompts? You will be surprised at the amount of insight gained from pondering these particular questions each day. You may find some questions worth continuing to journal after the initial four weeks of journaling suggested in our instructions, as they can help you feel a healthier sense of balance throughout each day. At some point, you may also want to create at least one or two 12 month calendars and have them bound by your local copy shop.

Documenting our lives through journaling is well understood as a valuable exercise. It helps us to connect with and record the important content of our daily lives we might otherwise forget or not even consider. Answering these particular questions is a more focused approach to journaling than traditional free-style. It can be an extremely rewarding way to organize important thoughts that help improve our self-understanding and EQ.

As mentioned, these questions prompt us to examine experiences, feelings, and behavior that we might otherwise not reflect upon. By journaling our answers to these simple yet strategic questions every day for a month, we collect information about our minds and life experiences that help us quickly understand what self-awareness is all about.

By accumulating your answers and reviewing them, periodically, you will gain a more complete picture of emotional aspects of your daily life that are important to be aware of. In our program, you will explore a number of activities, such as this, that are interesting and effective ways to become more self-aware and improve your EQ.

## **IN CONCLUSION: Continuing to Monitor Ourselves**

Monitoring our thoughts and actions in this manner is a psychologically smart thing to do. Contemplating and answering these kinds of questions provide us with data that helps us assess how well we are conducting and exerting our minds, plus how well we are treating others. However, they are only the beginning. As mentioned, a larger, more complex process is ahead of you in order to get a thorough emotionally meaningful picture. Developing an acute sense of self-awareness involves examining a multitude of thoughts, communications, and behaviors, a few at a time over an extended period of time.

When we create written notes like a journal of questions such as these, our notes can help us identify much more than is possible through even a high level of self-conscious observation alone. When we combine acute observation with asking daily questions, it is possible to understand our minds better within a few months than we might otherwise understand, even throughout the span of our lifetime.

One of the few problems with becoming more self-aware is that certain weaknesses we learn of ourselves can be disheartening. To help keep your incentive and commitment alive as you become further involved in the process, we are providing you with a list of healthy reasons to monitor yourself. Please post and review this list, occasionally, to remind yourself of the meaningful reasons for continuing to monitor your thoughts, communications, and behavior.

**See: 12 Healthy Reasons to Monitor Ourselves**

**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.