Emotional Intelligence: A Transformative Theory

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How do people change themselves and become more healthy and productive individuals? What are the characteristics and specific behaviors of highly successful people? What is healthy personality and how do we develop a way of being in the world that is satisfying and healthy? How can you engage and motivate another person to focus on their strengths and develop themselves fully? Questions like this were important to Gary and I as we began to develop a practical and research derived theory of healthy personality and positive personal change.

A Personal Perspective

Our transformative theory of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has evolved from a life long personal friendship and professional relationship that we have enjoyed for more than sixty years. We grew up together and have provided support and encouragement for one another as we completed our education. When we graduated from high school Gary was voted “Most Friendly” and I was voted “Most Athletic.” We completed undergraduate and graduate degrees as classmates at the same universities and have worked in the area of positive psychology since 1966.

We supported ourselves through undergraduate school with athletic scholarships. Gary was a point guard on the basketball team, and I was a linebacker on the football team. Gary still handles the ball and seeks peaceful solutions in our business relationships, and I confront every situation forcefully and with as much power as I can muster. Gary was a business major, and I liked to write poetry and read Thoreau. We made a good team and balanced our weaknesses with the individual strengths of the other.

We received assistantships that financed our graduate education and had the opportunity to gain experience in counseling while completing our degrees. Gary liked administration and teaching, and I liked counseling and psychotherapy. We became interested in healthy personality and positive psychology in graduate school and were coached by wonderful professors and mentors who had been students of Carl Rogers at the University of Wisconsin.

Our major professors, William E. Truax, John McQuary, Harold Murphy, were instrumental in forming the Texas Personnel and Guidance Association (Texas Counseling Association). They were extremely active in national professional counseling organizations. As doctoral fellows we had many opportunities to meet and learn from the people who shaped the development of the counseling profession in Texas.

Both Gary and I were deeply involved in the third force movement in the 1960s and we were most interested in humanistic/existential theory and the works of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Gordon Allport, Eric Fromm, Rollo May and Martin Buber. I met Carl Rogers as a second year doctoral student and welcomed him to Dallas as
the keynote speaker for the national conference of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (American Counseling Association). My major professor gave me the responsibility of hosting Dr. Rogers during his presentations at the conference as a reward for all the box carrying and speech writing assignments that I had completed as a first year doctoral student.

I had read all of Rogers’ books and articles and he was a kind and gentle man who seemed to be genuine in his person as well as in his work with others. I later met with him in California and he reviewed and provided helpful suggestions for the first positive assessment instrument that Gary and I created. The person and professional works of Rogers was the major influencing factor in the development of our positive assessment approaches. We developed assessment instruments that were positive and helpful to clients and all of them are learning and coaching tools rather than “tests.”

Our person centered and relationship focused approach to teaching, counseling, coaching and consulting grew out of the research and writings of Rogers and his clarification of the essential conditions of an effective helping relationship. Empathy, acceptance, genuineness, positive regard and honesty are the qualities that we keep in our friendship and in the teaching and coaching relationships that we create with others. His early research has been recently confirmed and reinforced by current findings in neuropsychology and interpersonal neurobiology. The human brain learns best in a relationship free of threat, high in challenge and characterized by acceptance, empathy, respect, genuineness and positive regard. Active listening and empathy skills are essential to achieving personal excellence.

Like us, you will develop your personal theory of human behavior and professional coaching to fit your own unique strengths and interests. Coaching involves emotional (heart) skills as well as cognitive (thinking) skills. When you learn to harmonize your cognitive and emotional minds by learning and applying EI skills you will achieve excellence in your life and career.

**History and Development**

During the decade of the 1970’s Transactional Analysis, Gestalt Therapy, Transpersonal Psychology, and Selye’s early work on the effects of stress began to influence thought and practice in psychology, counseling, and psychotherapy. Gary and I were beginning to see that no one theory or approach was sufficient to provide an applied model for the teaching, consulting and coaching work that we enjoyed doing. We began to develop our own theory of human behavior and a new model of healthy personality that could be research based. We wanted an integrated and confluent theory not a borrowed or external eclecticism.

The only healthy personality assessment at this time was the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and it had severe limitations psychometrically and questionable construct validity. Shultz’s Firo B was another instrument available at the time. Seymour Epstein’s Constructive Thinking Inventory (CTI) became available as a measure of constructive thinking and Epstein sees constructive thinking as the essence of emotional intelligence. Dr. Judy Cox and I co-authored an article published in a national counseling journal that reported the congruent validity of the ESAP and the CTI.

In the decade of the 1970’s, I completed post doctoral training in group and family therapy and asked Bob Goulding to provide the individual therapy that I needed for membership in advanced psychotherapy organizations. He said that I did not need individual therapy and said that I should just make up my own theory and do what I thought worked best. I completed advanced Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Training with Bob and Mary Goulding and Erv and Miriam Polster. I watched Bob Goulding closely as he did individual therapy in extended marathon groups, and I began to understand how to help people make positive changes quickly. I called Gary after my return from California, resigned my tenured professor position at the university, and we began to develop our theory of positive assessment and positive personal change.

In the 1980s’ Cognitive Psychology, Social Learning Theory, and Rational Emotive Therapy brought the brain and thinking processes back to a focal point in psychology. Cognitive behavioral theory emphasized the central role of thinking in emotional and behavioral responses. Behavioral medicine began to make clear connections between emotional stress levels and physical health. We began to learn about the workings of the emotional mind and neuroscience began to replace earlier theoretical explanations with specific research findings. Gary and I were most interested in a positive and practical theory that we could apply in our teaching, counseling, consulting and coaching. We wanted an applied
theory that we could use with diverse groups and one that would have applications for teaching, counseling, coaching and consulting.

In a concentrated research effort (1977-1980), we developed and published the Personal Skills Map (PSM) as a positive assessment and personal skills development model. We maintained an extensive initial item pool and established a cumulative data base to continuously revise and improve our assessment instruments. For more than thirty-five years the Personal Skills Map has been effectively used with almost one million people in many countries of our world.

Margo Murray began to use the PSM as an assessment tool in her focused and seminal work in mentoring to improve performance with clients around the globe. She was our first professional associate. Margo directed PSM translations in various languages and supervised the use of the instrument in many countries of the world. We have enjoyed our work with her for the past thirty-five years, and she now leads EILS Certification Workshops as a founding faculty member of the Emotional Intelligence Training and Research Institute (EITRI).

The self scoring PSM was a 244 item instrument that was difficult to administer and score. In 2012 we completed a focused research and standardization process to develop the Scale for Career and Life Effectiveness (SCALE) as a new online assessment. The SCALE profile is based on an international business sample and is brief, easy to administer, and interpret. The SCALE is our most valuable instrument for mentoring and executive coaching in organizations.

Because of the convergence of philosophical thought and psychological theory, we were learning more about designing assessment and skill development programs that could be used in education, business, clinical and wellness settings. We created and published the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) in the 1990s’ and began a focused research program to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument. The ESAP is now being used world wide to design mentoring and coaching programs and curricula for college students and as a model for improving student success.

A large university in South Africa uses the ESAP to design proactive interventions with mentoring and advising for career development to improve student achievement and retention. Colleges in the United States use the ESAP as a model for developing student success programs. The ESAP and our book, Emotional Intelligence: Achieving Academic and Career Excellence are key elements in the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) at McLennan Community College (MCC) in Waco, Texas. The use of our work at MCC is an excellent model of how our work can be used to develop a climate for student success. Galveston College also included the ESAP and book in its strategic planning process (QEP) to improve student and college success.

The ESAP has been used as a model for helping managers develop coaching skills. Recently I co-authored a book with Ashis Sen and Surya Rao titled Fueling Success: How Emotional Intelligence Helped Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) and its Employees. The ESAP was used to introduce EI coaching skills to senior managers in this Fortune 500 company in India.

In the 1990s’, Emotional Intelligence became a focus point in business consulting and training. Books by Daniel Goleman helped communicate the importance of the emotional mind in career success, productivity and leadership. Our research findings were supportive of most of Goleman's assumptions. Rick Hammett and I have enjoyed learning and working with Goleman's colleague, Robert Emmerling in India.

Our transformative EI theory is practical, research based and well suited for EI training in business settings. In 2008 we were invited to India to provide the first EI certification workshop for professionals there and provided keynote addresses for the first EI Global Forum in Mumbai. After more than thirty-five years of research, teaching, counseling, coaching and consulting, we are pleased that our work was being accepted and used for good purposes in many countries of the world.

My Chinese doctoral students assured me that I had achieved ‘long life’ and my work would go on after me. If this is true it is because our students and colleagues have applied and improved our initial work through research and application studies. We are deeply thankful for the support and collaboration of colleagues like Margo Murray and Rick Hammett who have deeply involved themselves in our work and greatly improved its practical value to others. After a career in the U.S. Navy, Rick Hammett completed his doctoral studies with us and a dissertation with the Personal Excellence Map.
Rick joined us in our life’s work with transformative emotional intelligence in 2004.

Our transformative theory of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was formed by a confluence of philosophical and psychological thought from both the East and the West. Our theory of healthy personality is more Eastern than Western, and we never separated psychology from philosophy. Our thinking is circular rather than linear and constructive as well as critical. Each year brings growth and change in our theory and in our work with clients.

At the age of seventeen my English IV teacher suggested that I read Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. I did and I have read it many more times during the last fifty years.

Thoreau read Emerson and so did Vivekananda. Emerson read the Vedas and Vivekananda lived the Vedas. I have the good fortune to read Emerson, Thoreau, Vivekananda and the Vedas. Thoreau took only one book to Walden Pond and it was the Gita. I read it daily.

My many trips to India during the last several years have provided me with the best opportunities to be a student and to learn. From my experience with brilliant and successful managers and academicians in India, I developed the Life Style Type Indicator (LSTI). The LSTI is based on Vedic Psychology and unlike the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) it focuses on healthy personality and positive personal change. Rick Hammett and I have extensively field tested the LSTI with successful senior managers in India. Gary, Rick and I completed a research study supported by the Forum for Emotional Intelligence Learning (FEIL) in Mumbai and reported the results of a congruent validation study with the LSTI and the MBTI.

Now, in the decade of 2010 an added and increasing focus is on how emotional intelligence is learned and developed. The AWAKE Daily Goal Achievement process is one specific illustration of our Emotional Learning System in action to help individuals develop healthy and skills based habits to improve health, success, and well being. Our book Professional Coaching: A Transformative and Research Based Model (Nelson, Low, Hammett, and Ashis Sen, 2013) is a coaching program that is offered for graduate academic credit at University of Houston-Victoria and and experiential e-learning process through Emotional Intelligence Learning Systems.

A Positive Change Model for the 21st Century

While much has been written about emotional intelligence, there is still some mystery about how people develop emotional intelligence. Some indications are that EI is developed from life experience, maturity, and specialized training programs. From day one of our research into personal and emotional skills, we developed our education and learning models of EI as skill sets that can be taught and learned in a variety of education and training formats. After much encouragement to further build out our EI-centric education and learning models. Teaching and Learning Excellence: Engaging Self and Others (Nelson, Low, Nelson, and Hammett, 2015) is our newest book completed to share and illustrate the value of teaching and learning through the lens of emotional intelligence and personal excellence.

Change characterizes the twenty-first century, and we will change. From our experience the most important skill needed in this century is intelligent self direction. We must learn to direct ourselves in ways that keep us healthy and productive in a rapidly changing and stressful world. One of Thoreau’s most often quoted statements was: “Things do not change, we change.” We change ourselves, and we help others change by making them aware of their strengths and helping them along the way.

In a recent article (Low, Nelson, and Hammett, 2015), we identified and described emotional skills and learning strategies people need for success in education, life, and work. Our research and experience suggest that emotionally intelligent (high achieving and healthy) students and adults behave in 21 observable and skillful ways when interacting with self and others in personal and work situations. The 21 key skill sets of transformative emotional intelligence for healthy living and working in the 21st century are:

1. Communicate clearly, honestly and directly (Assertion)
2. Ability to quickly establish and maintain healthy and effective relationships (Interpersonal Comfort – Social Awareness)
3. Accurately sense and communicate an understanding of the thoughts, emotions, and beliefs of others (Empathy)
4. Make quick, creative, and effective decisions (Decision Making)
5. Positively impact and empower others (Leadership)
6. Consistently (daily) set and achieve meaningful personal goals (Drive Strength)
7. Effectively manage self to meet accepted responsibilities and commitments on time (Time Management)
8. Complete personal responsibilities and commitments despite difficulties, hardships, and distractions (Commitment Ethic)
9. Identify, manage, and express anger constructively and in a manner not harmful to self and others (Anger Management)
10. Effectively manage anxiety, threat, and fear (Anxiety Management)
11. Regulate and manage the demands and stressors of day to day living and working (Stress Management)
12. Actively identify potential areas for increased positive growth (skill development) and work to change self-defeating and problematic behaviors (Positive Personal Change)
13. Develop strengths, act wisely and accept responsibility for thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Self Esteem - active rather than reactive)
14. Seek challenge and personally meaningful learning (Intelligent Self-Direction)
15. Actualize potential (engaged and committed) to personal and professional growth by learning, developing, and using key EI skills and behaviors
16. Develop personal vision and mission to chart paths of intelligent self direction (Guidance and Vision)
17. Effectively use a personal system of empowerment to harness the energy, motivation, and power needed to achieve standards of personal excellence (Power and Commitment)
18. Discover, identify, and maintain personal congruence through an intentional use of self-valued beliefs and central purpose in life (Belief and Purpose)
19. Build support systems with healthy, productive personal relationships and work teams (Support and Relationships)
20. Actively seek to achieve work and life balance with a positive model of personal change (Balance and Change)

21. Intentionally learn to access and gain positive contributions of emotional intelligence and the emotional system

Academic leaders, teachers, counselors, coaches, and mentors can help students liberate and actualize their potential by providing a learning environment and relationship that is: (a) protective and safe, (b) permission giving and affirming, and (c) empowering (high in expectations and challenge). Developing EI skills is the process that guides and actualizes learning potential.

Many people still ask - How do you learn and develop emotional intelligence? We have tried to answer this question for teachers and learners. To facilitate the learning and development of key skills and strategies for healthy living and productive working, we wrote the book, Teaching and Learning Excellence: Engaging Self and Others with Emotional Intelligence. We documented research to guide a teaching and learning process to develop skills, behavior, strategies within a framework of personal excellence. Our goal was to foster a new, practical, and integrative perspective on the importance of learning emotional intelligence for both teachers and students.

Conclusion and Personal Invitation

The drive to make emotional intelligence more understandable, practical, and valuable is a journey worth taking. Emotional intelligence is our small voice in the world, and it will guide you on this exciting journey for very good reasons. Become and stay healthy, increase your performance and productivity, develop and maintain positive, healthy relationships in a diverse world (personal, collegial, professional), resolve problems and conflicts with skills, and develop a vision for life, work, and service that is congruent with your personal values and beliefs.

We invite you to join us in this journey.

Warmest personal regards, Darwin and Gary

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