

PRACTICAL WAYS TO GAIN GREATER EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN RECOVERY

By Brenda Greig, MBA, MA, LADC

- 1. Realize that the first reaction you have to something is emotional but you don't have to let that drive how you respond.** You can choose to pause and give your brain time to execute reasoning before responding. The key is to pause. We so often react in ways that further exacerbate the negative situation. When we pause, we have an opportunity to form a response rather than react. Many times we feel a feeling and act on it which leads to disastrous results. We can learn to have a feeling but not act on it. Feelings are not always true which is why we cry at movies. We need to engage reason more rather than relying on feelings so much.
- 2. Learn to identify your emotions and discern what is underneath what you are feeling.** If you are feeling angry, ask what is underneath that feeling? Perhaps your angry feeling is covering up feelings of inadequacy or feelings of distrust. When you are engaged in a snarky interchange with someone, stop and ask yourself why you are feeling snarky. Are you annoyed by something? Would you prefer they asked you in a different tone? When we identify the emotion we are feeling it raises our self-awareness which gives us the ability to manage the emotions better. We could choose to say, "When you ask that in such a demanding tone, it's hard to hear what you are saying" rather than responding in a snarky tone which only perpetuates the negative encounter.
- 3. Practice just hearing others without needing to respond.** Ask people who love you and want you to grow to let you practice just reflecting what you heard them say to you. Explain that you can sometimes misinterpret what they are saying and want to improve on hearing them well. Reflect on how often you hear the message they are intending to send. Recognize if you have a pattern of believing the worst or assuming a negative motive. Learn to ask clarifying questions so you can be sure you are hearing what others are truly saying.
- 4. Evaluate how often you are telling yourself truths rather than perceptions.** We can believe strongly about something even though it is not truth so it is important to test everything we tell ourselves by asking, "Is that a truth or a perception?" If you say, "I don't have any friends" it can be a depressing thought but if you ask yourself if that is a truth or a perception, you will likely learn it is just a perception. We can manage our emotions. A good first step is to be sure we are saying and thinking truths.

5. **When faced with conflict, begin by seeking to understand rather than to be understood.** When we fully seek to understand where the other person is coming from, we hear things we wouldn't otherwise hear and we show respect to the other person. Practice by not responding to the conflict but rather by reflecting on what they said. Respond by saying, "So you are saying I ...". By doing so, you will enhance your listening skills and give the other person a greater sense of being heard and understood.

6. **Practice going into a room of people and choosing to only caring about them only-not you and your agenda.** Make eye contact with each person and make a concerted effort to understand each of them in a fresh, new way. We gain insight into picking up on social cues when we practice other-centeredness. Too often addicts and alcoholics enter a room desiring all the attention. We can feel like our problems are bigger or more important than others. We can gain good social awareness and relationship management skills by becoming other-centered.

7. **Believe that you can change.** So many people say they can't control their visceral response to something but we know that isn't true. When you are at home and having an argument with someone and the doorbell rings, you are likely able to change your emotions enough to treat the person at the door kindly. You can change the way you respond emotionally. It's a choice that needs to be practiced consistently before it can become a habit. Choose to work diligently every day to combat old patterns of behaving. Our brains have become conditioned to respond in certain ways. Just like driving in America can seem second nature, if you are driving in Europe, you will need to focus because everything is opposite. Likewise, you will need to focus every day to re-train your brain to respond rather than react. You can do it!