

# MENTAL NOTES

A mind expanding e-newsletter from Mark Zust, *The Perceptionist*



## Our Emotional Mind

July, 2009

***“We don’t see things as they are. We see things as we are.”***

***– Anais Nin, Writer***

**Why is it that decisions which are made with your “gut” along with your head are viewed with distrust? Should the emotional side of decision making be discounted because it is “less rational” or more difficult to quantify?** Those were questions I was asked recently at a day-long training session on problem-solving. It was then I realized that the role of emotions in the workplace are still misunderstood. Even with dozens of books on the topic,



most notably Daniel Goleman’s treatise *Emotional Intelligence* to lay the groundwork, many people still think that recognizing and naming emotional states as we pursue meaningful work and interact (sometimes heatedly) with our colleagues is “touchy feely” and has no place at work. Numerous studies over the past 20 years have shown just the opposite. There is growing evidence that interpersonal skills are a greater indicator of success than either technical or intellectual competencies.

Daniel Kahneman, winner of the Nobel Prize for economics in 2002, states that business is *about emotions*. He argues that it takes a passion for work and the joy found in creating for people to succeed. People are much more likely to keep their focus and energy high when working on something they are good at and that they believe matters for the people and companies they work for. Learning how to be “emotionally intelligent” then is not just “sensitivity training” but rather understanding how your brain works

and using this information to *choose* how you want to think and act. According to Marica Reynolds, an EI practitioner and coach, “To make better decisions, stimulate our creativity, increase our persuasive powers and live healthier, more peaceful lives, we must learn how to partner with the feelings that arise from our emotional reactions, not suppress them like we’ve been taught to for so many years.” It all begins with an awareness of our emotional states and a willingness to work with, not against them.

### Understanding Emotional Intelligence:

- 1. EI in a nutshell.** According to author, coach and EI practitioner Marcia Reynolds, Emotional Intelligence is “A conscious effort where an individual 1. identifies the current emotional state (one’s own or that of someone else), 2. determines the emotional trigger or source of the emotional state, then armed with this knowledge, 3. chooses a reaction from a range of possibilities. The result is an increase in one’s confidence and peace of mind while connecting with others at a deeper, more effective level.”
- 2. Understand what motivates you.** Marcia Reynolds goes on to explain: “It’s a simple formula. If I WANT to do a good job, I do it. If I don’t feel like doing a good job, I don’t, at least I do not perform up to my maximum potential. I might do what is required, but my *discretionary effort*—the extra effort that drives a company’s competitive edge—rests on how I FEEL in any given moment.” In other words, how can you be excellent at something if your heart’s not in it?
- 3. Emotions guide the brain.** For all the talk about the supremacy of rationale thought over emotional reactivity, the reality is that you can’t just will your mind to override your emotions and dedicate yourself to a job you hate, at least not for the long haul. Even if you try to shame, bully or otherwise convince your brain that this is what you “should” be doing rather than pursuing work that you know, deep down, is an honest reflection of your interests, values and skills, your brain releases chemicals that actually *hinder* your creativity and contribute to feelings of unease. The only way to be truly creative and do excellent work is to find a reason for *wanting* to do it. This desire, if it’s sincere and without self-delusion, (ie: “I’m doing this work not because I like it but because I can buy a new car with my bonus”), produces a very different chemical reaction in your head that increases the efficiency of brain activity and the higher performance that goes with it. In other words, it’s how you *feel* about what you’re doing that matters most to your brain.

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