Emotional Intelligence: It is all about balance

By Vanessa Davies   15 Mar 2017

At the recent Digital Swarm event hosted by DigitLab, Mark Baker, founder and CEO of MyGrow, talked about the stories we tell ourselves and how our personal narratives shape our lives on every level. This was a welcome dose of perspective for an audience focused on performance and perfection in everything it does.

Using science and humour, he explained that the human mind is like Velcro for negative thoughts and Teflon for positive reinforcement. We internalise every negative message we receive or imagine until we have formed an internal image of what our personal identities are. Words like 'ugly', 'worthless' and 'insignificant' plague every waking moment, moulding who we think we are and what we think others see when they look at us.


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We all have over 86bn neurons in our minds, each with more processing power than the laptop I am using to write this. These neurons communicate via a complex infrastructure in the mind, delivering messages through the release of chemicals (hormones).

Which chemical is released depends on what you are thinking and feeling at the time. If something happens and you feel happy about it, happy hormones are released and that experience is filed as a happy one. On the other hand, if something happens that makes you feel angry or ashamed, hormones to match those emotions are released. That experience is filed as shameful or anger inducing – maybe even both.

The thing about these hormones is that they are chemicals that pervade the entire body. You do not experience a localised emotion in the tip of your pinkie finger, for instance. When something makes you mad, all of you is mad. It becomes who you are in that instant.

Feedback loop

Baker explained that our DNA has receptors for the messages it receives. The more messages it gets of any particular kind, the more receptors are created for that message. This increase in receptors sends a message to the brain via the hypothalamus, telling it that it needs a lot more of that emotion and the more it gets, the more it needs. This cycle is at the heart of emotional addiction. In addition, it leads to a subconscious search for more and more of the toxic emotions we have come to rely on just to feel normal.
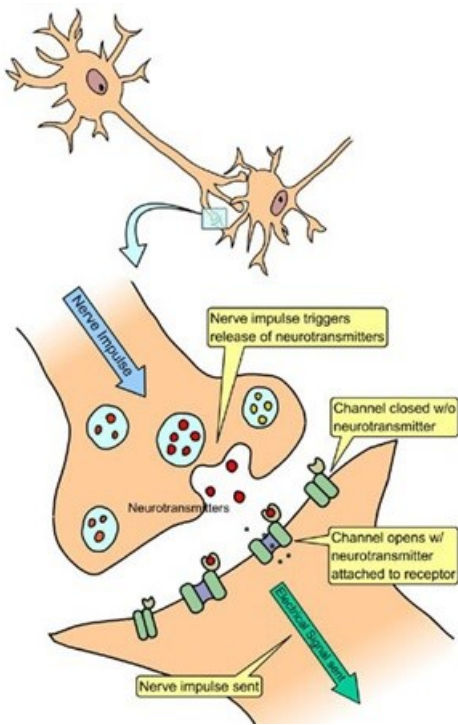
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[Martin Seligman](), the father of positive psychology, describes what he calls "learned helplessness." It is the tendency of people to stay in painful and toxic situations even when an escape becomes available, because they have learned to tolerate the pain. It feels normal to them.

We tell ourselves stories to explain why we are maintaining the status quo, instead of improving the course of our lives when we have the chance to do so.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is more than just touchy-feely; it is the hallmark of maturity and balanced personal growth and it is rare. Balanced EQ comprises 15 distinct competencies, which make up 85% of leadership skills. Mastering them leads to 43% higher staff retention. In other words: emotional intelligence is important. For more information, go to www.mygrow.co.za.

Our thanks to DigitLab and Hardy Boys for a brilliant evening and to the speakers, Baker, [David Leslie]() and [Ryan Fauconier]() for their inspiring stories, showing us the importance of narrative in every part of our lives. In the end, a good story is all about balance and, after this, I am inspired to make my life a very good story indeed.

ABOUT VANESSA DAVIES

I am an SEO and content marketing manager at Jellyfish's SA office. Words are my first love, and copywriting is what I live for. Search engine optimisation makes it easier to decide what to write, and who to write it for.

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