

## **How Working the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous Increases Emotional Intelligence (EQ)**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to self-control, zeal, persistence, the ability to motivate oneself, relating well to others, and knowing and controlling one's emotions.

People can be more successful at work, at home, in their community, and in relationships when they learn to draw on the power of emotional intelligence and develop emotional competencies. (Noyes xvii) According to Segal, "there are very clear ways to increase your EQ" (19). At the same time, "emotional intelligence can be static or changeable" (Simmons 18). Simmons contends that once "emotional intelligence has been formed in adolescence, most people do not change" although conscious efforts to increase emotional intelligence do result in emotional intelligence growth (19). Whether development occurs or not is based on the desire and willingness to change. In the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, there exists this desire and the action steps to take which bring about sobriety and increased emotional intelligence.

What is Alcoholics Anonymous? This statement is usually read at the start of every A.A. meeting around the world, and is known as the Preamble of A.A.:

It is fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. (Box 1980: 1)

This desire for personal change is crucial for members of Alcoholics Anonymous:

Under the lash of alcoholism, we are driven to A.A., and there we discover the fatal nature of our situation. Then, and only then, do we become as open-minded to conviction and as willing to listen as the dying can be. We stand ready to do anything which will lift the merciless obsession from us. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 24)

It is at this point of willingness that members of Alcoholics Anonymous begin to take certain steps which bring about a personal transformation from emotional bankruptcy to emotional intelligence. These steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 58)

One of Cashman's points of self awareness for leading through authentic self-expression is using a coach. "Having a coach as your partner during your growth process might be the most 'right' thing you ever do" (60). Goleman agrees about the "power of mentoring" (174). From the very start, a new-comer to Alcoholics Anonymous is encouraged to accept the help and direction of a sponsor, A.A.'s term for a coach or mentor. This person shares their experience, strength, and hope. The sponsor is someone who:

has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured - these are the conditions we have found most effective. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 18-19)

The sponsor also has a sponsor. The person being sponsored is generally referred to as a sponsee. To be in the middle of sponsorship, serving and helping others while being guided and held accountable is a win-win situation. Sponsors lead by example and model the change and behavior expected, just as an emotionally intelligent leader would.

One of the first admonitions a sponsor will give a newcomer to Alcoholics Anonymous is that "a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty" is absolutely essential. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous will not work for them without it. People who are unable to obtain or maintain sobriety are "usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves", let alone others. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 58)

With the very first step, a transformation begins. This transformation is referred to as a personality change, a psychic change, or a spiritual experience or awakening. A "personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms" (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 569). This personality change develops slowly over a long period of time. It is a process that never ends. At the same time, the change is often so remarkable that what "often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self discipline" (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 569).

"Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery" (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 570). They are indispensable.

Under the lash of alcoholism, we are driven to A.A., and there we discover the fatal nature of our situation. Then, and only then, do we become as open-minded to conviction and as willing to listen as the dying can be. We stand ready to do anything which will lift the merciless obsession from us. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 24)

This open-mindedness grows into genuine innovativeness, creative thinking, and the ability to truly listen and ponder another person's idea and viewpoint. These are assets to an emotionally intelligent leader.

The Twelve Steps are generally worked, the first time through, in order. By the time a member gets to Step Four, the fog has cleared a bit, and under the direction and help of the sponsor, a searching and fearless personal inventory is undertaken. This is the starting point for accurate self-assessment, seeing one's strengths and shortcomings. Character flaws, or instincts which have gone astray, cause a lot of trouble.

"Desires - for the sex relation, for material and emotional security, and for companionship - are perfectly necessary and right [...] Yet these instincts, so necessary for our existence, often far exceed their proper functions" (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 42). In the self-inventory:

We want to find exactly how, when, and where our natural desires have warped us. We wish to look squarely at the unhappiness this has caused others and ourselves. By discovering what our emotional deformities are, we can move toward their correction. Without a willing and persistent effort to do this, there can be little sobriety or contentment for us. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 43)

The inventory is written and then shared with another understanding person, usually the sponsor. The written account begins with a listing of resentments – who or what, why, and what in the person was affected. It is probably the alcoholic's self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal or sex relations that have been interfered with. This is then taken a step further. It is pointed out that the people on the resentment list were human beings as well, struggling just like everyone else. They may be spiritually sick. The newcomer is then taught to pray for the people on the list. "We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend" (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 67).

Looking at the inventory again, the person is directed to put out of their mind the wrongs done to them but to look for their own mistakes. Invariably the alcoholic, in some way, has set the ball in motion.

Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 67)

The inventory process continues in much the same way, addressing also the areas of fear, sex conduct that has been injurious to others, and harms – other than sexual - done to others. An old Alcoholics Anonymous adage is "we are only as sick as our secrets." Anything that is considered a secret is shared.

Many payoffs result from this process. This is the first step the person takes in really getting to know themselves. It is the beginning of a lifetime of self-observance, being aware of feelings, actions, and the impact they have on other people. Steps Four and Five are the baby steps for a

self-aware and emotionally mature person. The links between feelings and actions and the effect on others are brought into conscious awareness. Other developments are trustworthiness, reliability, and integrity. This is the start of being able to get along with people, even difficult ones. Conflict management is enhanced. Communication skills are increased as well.

An important aspect of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is that God alone is the judge. The only criteria, for example, for guidelines for sexual conduct are set out as:

We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't. What can we do about them? We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it. In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test - was it selfish or not? We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed. Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it. God alone can judge our sex situation. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 69)

This way of thinking promotes harmony and acceptance of other people, regardless of who they are or what they believe.

Hand-in-hand with this is the aspect of authenticity. Sobriety anniversaries are often commemorated with bronze medallions with the number of years of sobriety engraved on them as well as the words "To Thine Own Self Be True" from William Shakespeare's Hamlet:

This above all, to thine own self be true;  
And it must follow as the night the day.  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Again, in Alcoholics Anonymous, God alone is the only judge – of anyone, which promotes the character traits of tolerance, acceptance of others, and the ability to take a firm and possibly unpopular position if it is determined to be the "right" one.

Steiner refers to emotional intelligence as emotional literacy. He lists ten commandments of emotional literacy. One of them is "Thou shall apologize and make amends for your mistakes. Nothing will allow you to grow faster" (187). Steps Eight and Nine are about personal relations.

First, we take a look backward and try to discover where we have been at fault; next we make a vigorous attempt to repair the damage we have done; and third, having thus cleaned away the debris of the past, we consider how, with our newfound knowledge of ourselves, we may develop the best possible relations with every human being we know.

This is a very large order. It is a task which we may perform with increasing skill, but never really finish. Learning how to live in the greatest peace, partnership, and brotherhood

with all men and women, of whatever description, is a moving and fascinating adventure. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 77)

No field of investigation could yield more satisfying and valuable rewards than this one. Calm, thoughtful reflection upon personal relations can deepen our insight. We can go far beyond those things which were superficially wrong with us, to see those flaws which were basic, flaws which sometimes were responsible for the whole pattern of our lives. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 80)

This sums it up well:

The readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts, and to take responsibility for the well-being of others at the same time, is the very spirit of Step Nine. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 87)

Self-assessment becomes a way of life in Alcoholics Anonymous. Step Ten calls for continued inventory and to promptly admit it when wrong. This way of being helps reinforce thinking before speaking or doing. This is another component of a good leader and emotionally intelligent individual.

Step Eleven calls for prayer and meditation. As Cashman put it so well, the benefits of meditation are limitless: “stress, fatigue, and tension were dissolved” (132); “As long as the outer life is connected with the inner values of Being, then all the avenues of the outer life will be rich and glorious” (132); “open our awareness to our true potentiality” (137); “It is the foundation, the platform for a more masterful life” (138). In Alcoholics Anonymous, daily meditation is stressed. “One of its first fruits is emotional balance” (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 101-102). “When we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support” (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 97).

There is a direct linkage among self-examination, meditation, and prayer. Taken separately, these practices can bring much relief and benefit. But when they are logically related and interwoven, the result is an unshakable foundation for life. Now and then we may be granted a glimpse of that ultimate reality which is God's kingdom. And we will be comforted and assured that our own destiny in that realm will be secure for so long as we try, however falteringly, to find and do the will of our own Creator.

As we have seen, self-searching is the means by which we bring new vision, action, and grace to bear upon the dark and negative side of our natures. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 97).

This practice of meditation is probably the foundational key to emotional intelligence and being an effective leader and team member, whether it is the team at work or the family team at home.

Optimism, enthusiasm, empathy, and appreciation are other powerful results of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Service work is vital. Step Twelve is two-fold: (1) to help others who suffer from the disease of alcoholism by sharing personal experience, and (2) to practice the principles of the Twelve Steps in every aspect of life. The Steps are not worked through just once but become a way of living.

There is much time, energy, and dedication to helping others, whether they are family members, friends, neighbors, or other alcoholics. Feelings of usefulness, purpose, and belonging are manifested and grow. The purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous, “to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety”, is a very personal one as well.

The relationship between the sponsor and the sponsee continues. The sponsee has accountability to the sponsor. This is a relationship of choice on both ends though. A person never outgrows the need for a sponsor because change and growth are lifelong. Adaptability becomes more natural as time goes on. As Cashman says, “Adaptability is a [...] crucial quality for effectively dealing with change” (95) and an emotionally intelligent leader embraces “purposeful learning contained the unending, creative flow of life” (83).

One thing that must be pointed out is that no one can make anyone do anything in Alcoholics Anonymous. Everything is done willingly and voluntarily. There is no money involved or anything of the sort. “True leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness” (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 567). In this kind of atmosphere, emotionally intelligence and self-confidence thrives.

The interaction that takes place between people and enhances combined effort is a fundamental element of Alcoholics Anonymous. The program is referred to as a “we” program. Alcoholics Anonymous is the textbook of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is written from the perspective of “we”. Notice that the Steps of the program are written in the form of “we”, ie., “We admitted we were powerless, that our life was unmanageable” (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 58). Working to learn and live the principles as outlined in the Twelve Steps in a group situation develops “skills in collaboration and teamwork” (36), competencies of emotional intelligence Goleman referred to as “unique strengths of the stars” (36).

Learning how to make personal sacrifice for the sake of the group is a foundational tenet of Alcoholics Anonymous. “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities” (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 184). This anonymity is embodied by humility and sacrifice. This way of being, combined with integrity, self-confidence, and healthy self-esteem, makes for good leaders and team members.

Self-control is learned from the start. Anger is not a justifiable luxury for an alcoholic. Of course, the emotion of anger will be felt from time to time but what is done with it is the important part. “We pause, when agitated” or in doubt. We remind ourselves of the fact that we are “not running the show” (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 87-88). Self-restraint is vital:

This carries a top priority rating. When we speak or act hastily or rashly, the ability to be fair-minded and tolerant evaporates on the spot. One unkind tirade or one willful snap judgment can ruin our relation with another person for a whole day, or maybe a whole year. Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen. We must avoid quick-tempered criticism and furious, power-driven argument. The same goes for sulking or silent scorn. These are emotional booby traps baited with pride and vengefulness. Our first job is to sidestep the traps. When we are tempted by the bait, we should train ourselves to step back and think. For we can neither think nor act to good

purpose until the habit of self-restraint has become automatic (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 91).

“Acting as if” is a basic tool in Alcoholics Anonymous. To visualize the desired way of being, the ideal, and to “act as if” creates genuine integration over time. The behavior is no longer acting but an authentic way of being for the emotionally intelligent individual.

The ability to leverage and appreciate diversity is a by-product from working the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and being a part of the fellowship of A.A.

We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain's table. Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined. The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 17).

Cashman extols the traits of optimism and appreciation. “Appreciation will energize people. [...] Learn to give, receive, and encourage appreciation.” (156, 124-125) Goleman says that leaders are emotional magnets, exuding upbeat feelings which attract talented people. (11-12) Attitudes of gratitude, enthusiasm, and optimism are developed and grown through practicing the principles of the Twelve Steps.

We aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life. [...] we think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others. (Wilson, Alcoholics Anonymous 132)

The transformation that occurs when an emotionally bankrupt person works the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and enables him to be emotionally intelligent, more so all the time, is summed up well here:

We no longer strive to dominate or rule those about us in order to gain self-importance. We no longer seek fame and honor in order to be praised. When by devoted service to family, friends, business, or community we attract widespread affection and are sometimes singled out for posts of greater responsibility and trust, we try to be humbly grateful and exert ourselves the more in a spirit of love and service. True leadership, we find, depends upon able example and not upon vain displays of power or glory. (Wilson, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions 124).

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