

# Cracking the Curiosity Code

*The Key to Unlocking Human  
Potential*

*Diane Hamilton, PhD*

*Chapter 10*

# Curiosity and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence accounts for 80 percent of career success.

Daniel Goleman

Doug Conant described the occasion when he lost his job and engaged an outplacement agency in his pending job search. He said the agency greeted him with what he described as four magic words that transformed his attitude and ultimately his leadership style, “How can I help?” Those four simple words, he said, served as a touchpoint. It became a cornerstone for how he engaged disenfranchised employees and increased profits during his tenure as president of Nabisco and as CEO at Campbell’s Soup.

In this brief vignette, Conant exhibited what is commonly referred to as emotional intelligence (or EI) for having the awareness and sensitivity to realize the impact people’s emotions have on their day-to-day performance and the curiosity to delve into the unknown and sometimes murky waters of those emotions.

The combined qualities of curiosity and its relationship to emotional intelligence are a subject that has intrigued me even longer than the subject of curiosity itself. Much of my doctoral work placed a major emphasis on EI, and throughout my studies, I found the two behaviors consistently described as having a close, almost symbiotic relationship.

So, in this chapter, I propose to first define and clarify exactly what is (and what is not) emotional intelligence and then to examine how emotional intelligence relates to curiosity.

First things first: just what is emotional intelligence?

That question may not be as simple as it seems. EI is sometimes confused with the term emotional quotient or EQ, which is the measurement of EI. The two terms can easily be confused. Further, even those who are viewed as pioneers in the study of emotional intelligence all seem to take a slightly different view on the subject.

For example:

Some of the earliest studies of EI were conducted by psychologists Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer. In their work, the two established that emotions enhance one's pursuit of productive outcomes when properly directed, which was in stark contrast to earlier theories of intelligence, which posited that emotions tend to impair logical thought or reasoning.

In their article "Emotional Intelligence," published in 1990, the two professors defined the concept as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."<sup>i</sup>

Their work was considered groundbreaking in the way they dissected the concept of EI into three categories:

- (1) how one assesses and communicates their emotions;
- (2) how one can manage or regulate their emotions; and
- (3) how one can effectively apply their emotions in the way they interact with others.

Their work is instrumental in defining EI and establishing the relationship between EI and a wide range of behaviors deemed critical to success, from creativity to leadership.

Another pioneer in the study of EI is psychologist, author, and science journalist Daniel Goleman. Though heavily influenced by the findings of Salovey and Mayer, he formed a somewhat different view on the subject. He has authored several books on the significance of emotional intelligence and has been an ardent champion of the notion that our emotions play just as critical a role in our success as does our intelligence. Goleman is largely

credited for taking the work of Salovey and Mayer beyond the research lab into the mainstream.

In his definition of emotional intelligence, Goleman described EI as having these five components:

- Self-awareness: Our ability to know ourselves, good and bad, and to be comfortable with that knowledge.
- Self-regulation: Our ability to control disruptive impulses and to think before acting.
- Internal motivation: Our ability to pursue goals with energy and persistence.
- Empathy: Our ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people.
- Social skills: Our ability to build and manage relationships and networks.

Beyond the scientific analyses of EI, I was most interested in the laymen's view and how EI and curiosity combine in that symbiotic relationship I spoke of previously. What do the authors, motivational speakers, business leaders, and entrepreneurs say about the two?

From the perspective of a business leader, Garry Ridge, president and CEO of WD-40, said it this way: "You mentioned emotional intelligence. Probably the biggest reason that I've seen most people who are very smart fail as leaders is because their ego eats their empathy instead of their empathy eating their ego."

Another recent guest on my program, Professor M. S. Rao, offered a similar perspective. Rao is known as the father of soft leadership and founder of MSR Leadership Consultants in India. He said, "Mostly overlooked, soft skills play a large part in actually keeping one's job. While people are hired for their hard skills like

knowledge, oftentimes people get fired for their lack of soft skills, including their emotional intelligence.”

Kare Anderson, an Emmy-winning former NBC and *Wall Street Journal* reporter and a guest on my program, took the question to an even deeper psychological realm: “We need to keep reminding ourselves that what makes us feel anxious, fearful, slighted, or otherwise stressed can have a deeper and longer tug on our attention than what makes us feel happy. Remind yourself that when you find a reason to feel good, in the moment, you can become more observant and able to make smarter choices, learn more and deepen connection with those you are around.”

However, from whichever vantage point you view the subject, the numbers don't lie. *Forbes* reported that forty-six percent of newly hired employees will fail within eighteen months. A lot of that is attributed to miscommunication, interpersonal skills, and soft skills, including emotional intelligence.

People typically don't lose their jobs because they can't do the work. They lose their jobs because they can't do the work with other people, whether it's colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, or customers. Personality clashes are not a function of intelligence as much as they are a function of emotional intelligence.

Simon T. Bailey is a public speaker, author, life coach, entrepreneur, and author of *Shift Your Brilliance: Harness the Power of You, INC.*<sup>ii</sup> He laid the topic out in very sobering terms on my show: “There are two different spectrums. There are leaders who are narcissistic and unfortunately will not keep their employees for very long. Then there are leaders who are tapping into that deeper emotional area. They are becoming very self-aware. To borrow a little bit of your work and your dissertation around emotional intelligence, they are becoming aware of their

areas where they have failed because whatever you don't deal with will eventually deal with you.”

Guy Winch, psychologist and author of the bestseller, *Emotional First Aid: Healing Rejection, Guilt, Failure, and Other Everyday Hurts*,<sup>iii</sup> offered his view about the universal nature of EI: “When we experience emotional wounds like rejection, failure, or loneliness, we're not even aware that these are emotional wounds that need to be treated. Why it resonated with people is because everyone has emotions, and everyone was like, ‘Yes, I have those feelings.’ Maybe that's correct that we do need to do something about them. Across cultures, languages, age, gender and races, EI is a characteristic that affects us all.”

Kevin Surace, an American technology innovator, speaker, and entrepreneur, made the differentiation between EI (or EQ) and IQ. When I interviewed him on my show recently, the CEO of Appvance, creator of an AI-based software QA platform, and *Inc.* magazine's 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year, answered this way: “Google has dumbed us down because Google will just answer all those questions. Arguably today, Alexa can do the same thing just by asking many of those questions. We're no longer curious about trivia questions; we just answer them. It's no longer useful for the human mind to spend any time on it.

“‘Can AI help us with X?’ is a curiosity question in Silicon Valley today. Often the answer is no. Everyone to your left and everyone to your right has about the same IQ plus or minus ten points. So, your IQ is not what's going to determine if you can become a CEO. Chances are, everyone is as smart as the next person, so that's not the determining factor. What differentiates them is EQ, which they're not taught it in school, in college, or at work.”

Of all of the guests who have appeared on my program to discuss curiosity and emotional intelligence, perhaps none have done so with as much animation and enthusiasm as Naveen Jain.

This billionaire, entrepreneur, and philanthropist explained the interdependency of EI and curiosity with great passion. He described intellectual curiosity as the key to solving both elementary problems at home and the problems of the world.

Jain, the founder of Moon Express, Viome, and other firms, also said, “Don’t lead a horse to water; make him thirsty, and he will find the water on his own.”

Okay, so we’ve heard from the scientists, the entrepreneurs, the authors, and the motivational speakers. But what about the tough guys, I mean, the *really* tough guys. How would they view the importance of soft skills, including emotional intelligence? Would they characterize EI as being critical to leadership?

I was determined to find out, so I talked with Mark Divine, a Navy Seal and expert in human performance. He emphasized mental toughness, leadership, and physical readiness. You would think his would be the consummate macho-based program with little or no focus on what we call soft skills. But I’ll have to say, he surprised me when I interviewed him.

When I asked him about the significance of EI in his leadership program, he said, “It is the power of your whole mind that makes a profound impact on the decisions you make and on your quality of life . . . that is the combination of your emotional intelligence, visual intelligence, imagination, visualization, and your intuitive intelligence. Much to the contrast of what many people believe, EI is an essential quality of toughness and leadership.”



I guess soft skills don't make anyone soft. According to Divine, it's just the opposite.

Emotional intelligence is not about being nice. It is about being impactful.  
Anonymous

There is a wealth of knowledge regarding the importance of developing curiosity. Researchers have concluded that curiosity, especially trait curiosity, has a positive relationship with emotional intelligence. Kashdan, Rose, and Fincham found that curiosity positively affects “motivation associated with recognition, pursuit, and self-regulation of novelty and change.”

So, according to the behaviorists, the scientists, the business leaders, the entrepreneurs, the motivational speakers, the authors, and even the Navy Seals, if you are in the position of engaging others, EI appears critical. And yet again, it is curiosity that serves as its engine.

\* \* \*

Okay, so we know EI is important, but what if you don't have a high level of emotional intelligence? How can you tell? Are there specific behaviors that indicate you may be lacking in EI?

Muriel Maignan Wilkins, co-founder and managing partner of Washington, D.C.-based leadership coaching and consulting firm Isis Associates, described the telltale signs of an absence of EI:

- People often become impatient or frustrated when others don't seem to understand them.
- They feel people are too sensitive and overreact to their comments.
- They are generally unconcerned with being liked at work.

- They weigh in early with their beliefs and defend them with rigor.
- They have the same expectations for others as they apply to themselves.
- They tend to blame others for most of the issues on their team.

Based on his ten years as an executive coach, Wilkens stated, “I have never had someone raise his hand and declare that he needs to work on his emotional intelligence. Yet I can’t count the number of times I’ve heard from other people that the one thing their colleague needs to work on is emotional intelligence. This is the problem: Those who most need to develop it (EI) are the ones who least realize it.”

So, given those behaviors, do you have sufficient emotional intelligence?

No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Theodore Roosevelt

\*\*\*

Through my own studies and countless interviews, I have always viewed the traits of curiosity and emotional intelligence to be essential soft skills, but I must admit that I had not fully appreciated the true nature of their connection until researching this book. Neither did I fully appreciate how the two, when working together, serve as anchor points for what many behaviorists perceive to be the Holy Grail of human behavior: achieving a meaningful life.

Let me conclude this section of my treatise on curiosity and its significance to so many critical aspects of our lives with a

summation by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic. He is an organizational psychologist, a professor of business psychology at University College London and Columbia University, and CEO at Hogan Assessment Systems.

In his 2014 publication, *Managing Yourself*, he mused about the age of complexity in which we find ourselves.<sup>iv</sup> He noted the vital nature of what he views to be the three key psychological qualities that will best serve us in our ability to survive: IQ, EQ, and CQ.

Chamorro-Premuzic stated, “While IQ is not something that can necessarily be taught or coached, EQ and CQ can indeed and *must* be developed if we are to thrive as business professionals, leaders or entrepreneurs.”

The author concluded: “Curiosity is the ultimate tool to help us produce the solutions we need to solve the complex problems we face.”

---

<sup>i</sup> [www.cogsci.rpi.edu/files/5065](http://www.cogsci.rpi.edu/files/5065)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Shift-Your-Brilliance-Harness-Power/dp/0768404576/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541102789&sr=1-1&keywords=Shift+Your+Brilliance&dpID=41chYwp%252BoPL&preST=\\_SY291\\_BO1,204,203,200\\_QL40\\_&dpSrc=srch](https://www.amazon.com/Shift-Your-Brilliance-Harness-Power/dp/0768404576/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541102789&sr=1-1&keywords=Shift+Your+Brilliance&dpID=41chYwp%252BoPL&preST=_SY291_BO1,204,203,200_QL40_&dpSrc=srch)

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Emotional-First-Aid-Rejection-Everyday/dp/0142181072/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541102880&sr=1-1&keywords=emotional+first+aid+guy+winch&dpID=51H1WKI7APL&preST=\\_SY344\\_BO1,204,203,200\\_QL70\\_&dpSrc=srch](https://www.amazon.com/Emotional-First-Aid-Rejection-Everyday/dp/0142181072/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541102880&sr=1-1&keywords=emotional+first+aid+guy+winch&dpID=51H1WKI7APL&preST=_SY344_BO1,204,203,200_QL70_&dpSrc=srch)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://hbr.org/2014/08/curiosity-is-as-important-as-intelligence>