



Perspective / Opinion

On Emotional Intelligence: The Importance of Perceived Control in Decision-Making

By Stacy Moroz and Kelli Cole

Earlier in the academic year, students from the Kern Institute Student Leadership Committee formed a workgroup to create a comprehensive Leadership Curriculum consisting of modules catered to aspects of leadership we deemed fundamental for aspiring medical leaders to know and regularly acknowledge. The purpose of the modules was to provide deeper insight into broader topics covered by our preclinical curriculum focusing on interpersonal and clinical skill development like REACH, 4C, Foundations of Clinical Medicine, and others. Specifically, we wanted to create a module on Emotional Intelligence—as defined by the Emotional Quotient or “EQ”—that would provide a framework for students to actively work on their EQ even after completion of the elective. Instead of introducing the topic of EQ and explaining its relevance to personalized medical care through improved bedside manner, conflict resolution, and communication skills, our goal was, and continues to be, to deliver a module that encourages students to challenge the role emotions play in their lives, to learn to use emotions as a tool rather than a liability in goal achievement, and, on a broader scale, to add lasting benefit to students' personal and professional lives. We did this by offering deliverable methods for students to further develop EQ on their own.

The motivation to create a module on developing EQ was born out of a sense of urgency to utilize inspiration from a point about our “two minds,” a concept originally made and elaborated on by a best-selling life-advice author and blogger, [Mark Manson](#). His work is peppered with attention-grabbing anecdotes, evidence-based psychology, and novel analyses to challenge commonly held beliefs about productivity, self-improvement, and happiness. Manson states that we have two minds, the “feeling brain” that senses emotion and the “thinking brain” that makes sense of our emotions. He uses these terms to describe the common public perception that emotions are a hindrance—*“if only I could get rid of my emotions, I’d be able to focus”*—through analogies and storytelling. Our perception of emotions seemed to match the misconceptions. When we took a step back to consider the role of the “feeling brain,” we immediately jumped to a series of negative associations: a distraction

clouding judgment or infringing on performance. However, further investigation into EQ helped to change our understanding of emotions.

Continuing our research into EQ, we found that emotional intelligence was not innate but, rather, a skill that could be exercised and improved, much like learning, practicing an instrument, or playing a sport. Moreover, we learned that exercising EQ could **improve perception of control**, even when we find ourselves in situations in which we have none, a common occurrence throughout medical training and active medical practice for both students and licensed healthcare providers.

Improved perceived control of our emotions—a core facet of emotional intelligence—proved valuable for remaining calmer under pressure and thinking logically faster. This phenomenon is something we often (incorrectly) attribute to removing emotions (“*pushing them out of the way in order to focus*”) rather than a byproduct of heightened sensitivity driven by emotions. Increasing our understanding of our emotions allows us to reflect on our values and, therefore, more easily identify what we morally align with and personally care about. In doing so, we can avoid indecision, build on our identity, and confidently move forward in our paths.

Choosing to embrace emotion as an asset in our armory of tools to navigate life benefits not only our professional lives as medical doctors and student doctors, but also has shown to reflect positively on our mental health, which is particularly imperative given the rise in physician burnout. Developing EQ by practicing self-awareness and learning how to channel our emotions in a healthy way allows us to practice empathy and, therefore, create healthier and stronger relationships with patients, colleagues, friends, family members, and ourselves. Manson illuminates that practicing EQ is a worthy investment since we are always choosing what we value, whether we are aware of this or not, by the ways in which we spend our time or choose to allocate our energy.

Demonstrating the connection between EQ and both professionalism and personal wellness, the module emphasizes the important influence emotions have on identity formation and how learning to navigate emotions positively influences your career and your life. With these benefits in mind, it becomes clear that early-career medical learners would gain invaluable life skills through EQ training.

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