

Emotional intelligence & Diversity Series

Affirmative Introspection: Looking Inside for a Pat on the Back and a Kick in the Pants

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- Have you ever wondered why you often repeat some behaviors that you promised yourself you would stop doing?
- Are you aware that you feel more comfortable in some settings and with some groups than others?
- Can you remember times when you reacted emotionally when one of your diversity hot buttons got pushed?

Affirmative Introspection, a key element of Emotional Intelligence & Diversity, is the ability to take an honest look at yourself with curiosity in a nonjudgmental way. It involves the ability to get insights into the multiple layers of your experiences and accept what you see, both your strengths and your vulnerabilities. This commitment to shedding light on your behaviors, feelings and intentions is a key element in choosing a better and more effective future, managing your emotions and accepting others.

Contrary to the popular notion that people are born with introspective capacities and that they can't be developed, you can train yourself to develop introspection skills. These skills will give you a greater sense of clarity and comfort with yourself. You will also increase your optimism and resilience by having an affirming, non-judgmental attitude. Let's take a look at what **Affirmative Introspection** involves.

Knowing what makes you tick

Knowing what makes you tick is a critical affirmative introspection competency because you can't control others, but on your best days, you can control yourself. Knowing who you really are, what motivates you, what brings you down, what you expect from yourself and others, and what shaped and influenced those needs and expectations is vital if you want to be not only right, but also effective. Developing awareness of yourself and your motivators frees you to choose more wisely from multiple options and increases the likelihood of building satisfactory and productive relationships.

To find out more about Emotional Intelligence & Diversity, get the authors' new book, *Emotional Intelligence for Managing Results in a Diverse World* (Davis-Black, 2008) and go to their website; www.EIDI-Results.org.

Being comfortable in your skin

How often do you wish we were a different height, a different weight, a different...you name it. Achieving comfort with yourself can be difficult. In order to become effective in accepting, valuing and dealing with others, though, you first need to become aware of those aspects of yourself that you have difficulty accepting. Emotional Intelligence skills in this area help you become aware of the different aspects of yourself that are not in harmony with your own image and come to terms with them. Emerson said “We can travel the world over but we take ourselves with us.” There is no escape from ourselves. The path to loving, respecting and honoring others is to love, respect and honor yourself first.

Being in tune with your own biases and hot buttons

Stereotypes, biases and hot buttons reflect the opinions, beliefs and knee-jerk reactions that we all have but are often too embarrassed to acknowledge. The film “Guess Who is Coming to Dinner” became popular in the USA because it touched this truth. We all have biases and hot buttons which can create strong feelings and reactions.

Perhaps you remember when you made a stereotypical assumption about someone. Was it when a supervisor gave you feedback in a very emotional way or when a client put stress on you with a last minute demand? How about the time a job applicant you were interviewing gave you a résumé with a misspelled word? Acknowledging these biases and hot buttons and their impact is the first step in managing them.

Not only do we all have “hot buttons” at work but we may be, without knowing it, the hot button for others. For example you may be a person who thrives on many visitors and having lively, loud conversations with them during the work day. Your office mate may prefer to work in peace and quiet with no disruption.

At times some of these behaviors are difficult for us to tolerate and they create intense emotions that lead us to respond impulsively and escalate a conflict. We feel “emotionally hijacked” by these hot buttons. It is only from our awareness of them and that we can choose to respond in a non-explosive way and free ourselves to behave in a more emotionally intelligent and effective way.

Gaining deeper insight into ourselves through Affirmative Introspection is the first of the four Emotional Intelligence and Diversity competencies. In the next article you’ll find out how to manage your reactions and feelings through Self-Governance.