

Do You Have What It Takes to Become Emotionally Fit?

One universal, dynamic malady affects many of us regardless of where we live on this vast planet we call Earth. Though this malady inflicts untold damage upon our lives and the lives of those we love, it often goes undetected.

I am not talking about global warming, war or political corruption. No, I am talking about something more personal. I am talking about an epidemic lack of emotional fitness. It is emotional cluelessness, to put it another way.

A man sitting in my office admitted with wisdom and humility, "I wouldn't know a feeling if it hit me in the face." He was headed toward divorce and looking for a miracle which would save his marriage. His sentiment expresses a universal problem. I have encountered this problem in the men, women and teens I have counseled over the last 30 years.

However, I encountered the lack of emotional intelligence not only in my practice but also in my own life. Like that man in my office I just mentioned, I couldn't recognize my feelings. I came from a family like many of you grew up in. We never talked about feelings except in an extreme or dysfunctional manner. This emotional cluelessness left me unequipped and unprepared for life like many others. As a result, I walked straight into multiple addictions and dysfunctional relationships as a teen and young adult.

I still remained emotionally unfit through my spiritual awakening at 19, college and into adulthood. I was studying counseling at the time and knew, as a future counselor, I would need to understand my emotions because only then could I counsel others toward understanding their own emotions. I was motivated to make this change, so I looked into option after

option in an effort to learn about my feelings only to conclude that no class, teacher or book could teach me what I wanted and needed to learn. I was totally dysfunctional and totally unable to identify or communicate my feelings. I was quite literally emotionally out of shape and in need of a trainer, but I could not find one.

I decided I would need to serve as my own trainer. I needed to teach myself. I created tools to help me start to manage my emotions. I succeeded over time and moved from a novice to an emotional black belt. I started to understand my feelings and in turn myself. The best part was my newfound abilities (which I share in the book *Emotional Fitness*) impacted every aspect of my life from my marriage to my business to my relationship with my God.

These tools I created had a significant impact on my life. I realized those tools could impact others. They were transferable and could be used to teach others how to live an emotionally fit lifestyle!

I am not going to tell you such a move does not take work. It takes a lot of work—hard work—but by doing the work, you can change from emotionally unfit to emotionally fit, and it will benefit all aspects of your life. Are you ready to get fit?

Being emotionally fit is a skill to be acquired, but it can only be acquired after the reality of feelings and emotional fitness is presented. When someone wants to talk about their feelings, we might be intrigued but easily become confused. This is our typical response.

Think about your own life for a moment. Let's start early in junior high. Think about the emotions you had at that time and your experience of others articulating emotions to you. Most remember expressions of anger but not much else beyond that. In many cases, the same is true for your high school and college experiences. Oftentimes, there was almost no

expression of any emotion except anger or a scant few other feelings. Therefore, most of us grew up emotionally impoverished.

Learning skills is the first key in understanding emotional fitness. However, skills alone do not produce world-class champions.

This is where the rubber meets the road. Those who hope to accomplish their goals are different from those who actually do accomplish their goals. Those who accomplish their goals actually do the work to achieve their success.

Work is the single divider between those who master a new skill and those who don't. As an example, let me present to you my son, Jubal. He was introduced to the world of martial arts when he was five years old and practiced several times a week. He was given the skills necessary for a black belt in the making. At each belt test, he was given a choice to continue to work toward the black belt or to give up.

He was challenged to quit numerous times along the way, but he never did as the desire to obtain the black belt overshadowed any other desire. He passed his test in the end and earned his black belt. His smile lit up the room when he was awarded it. His hard work led him to a worthwhile goal. Emotional fitness is also a worthwhile goal. It takes work.

Once people understand this process is going to require hard work, they are ready to start the important journey to become emotionally fit. {eoa}

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