

Decide and Conquer: Making Emotionally Intelligent Decisions

#WellbeingWarriors

Compiled by Vhutali Ndou
(Student Counselling & Development)

Quote by Stephen Covey: “Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you respond to it.”

The uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has left many students with the need to make various academic and personal decisions. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is your ability to identify and manage your emotions and those of others, so that you can make better decisions. EQ includes self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills.

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize a feeling as it happens. This ability to recognize how you feel from moment to moment helps you to not be at the mercy of your feelings. In his book about EQ, Goleman says, “people with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives, having a surer sense of how they feel about personal decisions from whom to marry to what job to take.”

Your self-awareness can help you understand how your emotions around the pandemic might be influencing your decisions. You must guard against deciding entirely based on how you feel.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What am I trying to achieve?
- What am I doing that is working?
- What am I doing that is slowing me down?
- What can I do to adjust?

Tips for cultivating self-awareness:

- Practice [mindfulness](#)
- Journal
- Notice what decisions you make when you are in a good mood, and what decisions you make when you are in a bad mood and recognize the difference between feelings and actions

Quote by Sun-Tzu: “In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.”

2. SELF-REGULATION

When you understand your emotions, you will be able to more effectively manage those emotions in the decision-making process. Self-regulation speaks to the ability to manage disruptive emotions, as these can override your ability to be rational. The goal is to find balance between how you feel and the facts of the situation.

Many of you are feeling anxious. The fact of studying during the pandemic is that teaching will mainly be conducted online. Instead of allowing the anxiety to turn you into a chronic worrier, think about practical steps that you can take to effectively cope with your academics.

Ask yourself the following question:

- Do you tend to make decisions based on your emotions or the facts of the situation? (the aim is to find balance)

Tips for self-regulating:

- Mindfulness
- [Cognitive reframing](#)
- Remain flexible and adapt to situations, read up on what you need for online learning so you can best decide if you can adapt to this way of studying

3. SELF-MOTIVATION

Your level of motivation will indicate to you if you will be able to focus on your studies and pay attention. Staying motivated requires delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness. According to Goleman, “being able to get into the ‘flow’ state enables outstanding performance of all kinds.” Please click here for a [definition of flow](#).

Ask yourself the following:

- Do I know how to motivate myself to do the things that are important to me?
- Am I motivated by internal or external factors?

Tips for self-motivation:

- Set SMART goals
- Delay gratification
- Write down your ‘why’ when asking yourself what it would mean to you to achieve your goal. This allows you to uncover and provide you with further motivation.
- Research and consult for assistance
- Strive for progress, not perfection
- Have positive affirmations all around you
- Review, it is important to see where you have gone wrong in the past to avoid similar actions in the future. This is a great motivator to see how much you have improved and how far you have come, and often you will be pleasantly surprised.

For more tips on motivation, click [here](#).

Quote by Barry Finlay: “Every mountain top is within reach if you just keep climbing.”

4. EMPATHY

Part of being able to respond to others' emotions is having empathy. Empathy is putting yourself in someone else's situation and understanding their reaction or feelings from their perspective. There may be differences, for example within genders or cultures, in how people express their emotions and part of having empathy is being able to understand this so that you can respond accordingly. Sometimes it takes simply asking what this person needs instead of assuming.

Empathy is important in decision making because it allows you to reflect on how your decisions affect others or can potentially affect significant people in your life. Developing empathy skills enhances our experiences, relationships, and general understanding of ourselves, other people, and the world around us. Understanding how the pandemic is affecting other students can help you cultivate self-compassion. Self-compassion will help you be more kind to yourself regardless of what academic or personal decisions you make during this time.

Ask yourself:

- Do I need to connect with other students to understand how others are coping with similar challenges?

We may react differently, but pain and fear are universal. We all experience pain and fear but may just express it differently. We can all learn from each other.

Tips for improving empathy:

- Cultivate listening skills
- Learn assertiveness skills
- Be vulnerable (read 'Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead' by Brené Brown)
- Do not make assumptions
- Examine your biases

5. SOCIAL SKILLS

Being able to manage others' emotions constructively is an essential part of EQ. People with high EQ are often seen as likeable, calm and easy to work with. An ability to identify facial expressions and body language will better enable you to respond to another's emotions and make choices on how you will react accordingly.

Relationships are based upon communication and trust, and emotionally intelligent individuals view every decision-making circumstance as an opportunity to develop or improve their relationships with others. Identify which relationships are critical in making your personal and academic decisions. Seek support from those close to you because social support will enhance your self-esteem when making those important decisions.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I seek cooperation and helpfulness when dealing with others?
- Am I better at solving problems alone or with the support of others?
- Am I better at resolving conflicts and negotiating disagreements?

Tips for handling relationships:

- Seek peer support
- Ask for help
- Learn conflict resolution skills
- Learn assertiveness and communication skills
- [Watch this clip](#) for tips on improving your communication skills

Please note that this article does not offer an exhaustive list of tips to help you cultivate EQ in making effective decisions. Take time to reflect and consult further before making important decisions. I hope that this helps you take the first steps in making the decisions that will assist in creating the life that you want.

Quote by Tony Robbins: "Using the power of decision gives you the capacity to get past any excuse to change any and every part of your life in an instant."