



# Constructive Thinking: The Key to Emotional Intelligence

*By Seymour Epstein*

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**Constructive Thinking: The Key to Emotional Intelligence** By Seymour Epstein

This is a book on how to gain control of one's emotions. It is a serious book that contains a theory of automatic processing it presents and its implications for controlling emotions. Epstein is a professor of personality psychology and a highly regarded research psychologist who has supported his theory with extensive research published in the most demanding professional journals. He was motivated to write the book by the success of a course he taught based on his theory. Students reported obtaining an understanding and control of their emotions that they never thought possible and that they said changed the course of their lives.

According to the theory, people operate by two minds, a rational-analytical mind and an intuitive-experiential mind, the latter being intimately associated with emotions. Each mind operates by its own principles and each has its own form of intelligence. The intelligence of the rational-analytical mind is measured by IQ tests and the intelligence of the intuitive-experiential mind (which is related to emotional intelligence) by the Constructive Thinking Inventory (CTI), a test developed by Epstein that is included in the book. By understanding the principles of operation of the intuitive-experiential mind, it is possible to train it as well as to learn from it, and thereby to improve one's emotional intelligence. The book provides exercises for applying the principles in everyday life and a review of a variety of other procedures for improving emotional intelligence. It is suited for use as a primary or supplementary text in courses on improving emotional intelligence or coping with stress as well as for individual reading.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

One of the great strengths of "Constructive Thinking" is its review of what qualities of personality lead to successful living,...to successful workplace performance, love, adjustment, health, and good parenting...His review is greatly enriched by a generous selection of anecdotes and case histories...Epstein is balanced, thoughtful, and often wise...Epstein's book is far better than most popular alternatives. It is a thoughtful, accurate depiction of how personality can lead to success and the ways one can improve oneself. His approach is rigorous and scholarly, yet accessible, and provides important information to the public.(Contemporary Psychology (review journal of American Psychological Association), December, 1999) -- *Contemporary Psychology (review journal of American Psychological Association), December, 1999*

#### About the Author

SEYMOUR EPSTEIN is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. A noted authority on personality, he has received continuous research support from the National Institute of Mental Health for over 40 years and has received their coveted Merit Award. He has published extensively, including an earlier trade-oriented version of this book entitled *You're Smarter Than You Think* (1993).

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Excerpts from Chapter I, "A Tale of Two Tales":

As a first step toward understanding the difference between emotional and intellectual intelligence, consider the following two perspectives on the meaning of life. As you read each passage, try to answer the following questions: How intellectually intelligent is the protagonist? How emotionally intelligent is he? On what basis did you distinguish between emotional and intellectual intelligence?

The first passage is from "My Confession" by Leo Tolstoi, the great Russian novelist, who describes his thoughts during a period of depression.

"When I thought of the fame which my works had gained me, I used to say to myself, 'Well, what if I should be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere...well, what then?...Such questions demand an answer, and an immediate one; without one it is impossible to live, but answer there was none... If I wished for something, I knew beforehand, that were I to satisfy the wish, nothing would come of it, I should still be dissatisfied...I knew not what I wanted...

"Such was the condition I had come to, at the time when all the circumstances of my life were pre-eminently happy ones, and when I had not yet reached my fiftieth year. I had a good, a loving, and a well-beloved wife, good children, a fine estate, which, without much trouble on my part, continually increased my income; I was more than ever respected by my friends and acquaintances; I was praised by strangers, and could lay claim to having made my name famous...

"I could not attribute reasonable motive to any single act, much less to my whole life. I was only astonished that this had not occurred to me before from premises which had so long been known. Illness and death would come..., if not today, then tomorrow, to those whom I loved, to myself, and nothing would remain but

stench and worms. All my acts, whatever I did, would sooner or later be forgotten, and I myself be nowhere. Why, then, busy one's self with anything? How could men see this and live? It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; as soon as we are sober again we see that it is all a delusion and a stupid one."

Now consider the following tale:

A Buddhist monk, being hotly pursued by a vicious tiger, fell off a cliff. By good fortune, he landed on a ledge. He could see the tiger waiting hungrily above him, but even if the tiger departed, he knew that the slope was too steep for him to climb. Since there was no escape from above and a sheer drop below, he realized his fate was sealed. No sooner did he have this thought, then the ledge that was supporting him began to develop cracks in it, and it was apparent that it would shortly fall away and hurtle him to his death. As he looked about, he spied a strawberry plant growing out of a crevice in the rock. He plucked a berry from it, ate it very slowly to savor its taste, and thought, "How delicious!"...

Given the awareness of the limited time we all have to live on earth, it is equally logical to conclude that life is futile, and there is no point therefore in living, as to conclude that one might as well make the best of what time one has. Although the two conclusions are equally logical, one is more constructive in the sense that it leads to a more satisfactory way of leading one's life. Does this mean that one should always think positively? Not necessarily, for thinking positively in some circumstances, such as in the face of danger, can lead to disaster. Thinking constructively is not the same as thinking positively. I have much more to say about constructive thinking later in this book. For now, I only wish to emphasize that specific kinds of thoughts precede and determine emotions, that these thoughts occur automatically, that they vary in constructiveness, and that constructive thinking underlies emotional intelligence. If you automatically think constructively, you will exhibit emotional intelligence, and if you don't, you won't...

In this chapter I tried to give you an intuitive feeling for the difference between intellectual and emotional intelligence and for the preconscious thoughts that underlie the latter. In the next, I discuss intellectual and emotional intelligence in greater detail and consider what each is and is not and what would have to be accomplished in the measurement of emotional intelligence to establish it as a scientifically viable concept comparable to intellectual intelligence.

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#### **Stanley Roman:**

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