



Emotional Health & Leadership

Welcome to our pocket guide to emotional health. Emotional health is a concept that is simple on one level and complex on another. It is simple in that once you understand its core principles – as explained in this guide – you will readily be able to apply those principles to the way you see and, importantly, engage with the world around you. However emotional health is also complex in that it has many layers and there is always something more to learn. In this sense gaining a full understanding of emotional health is an endless (but very enjoyable) journey, even for those of us who have worked with it for a long time.

You might already have come across the concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ (sometimes referred to as ‘EI’ or ‘EQ’). Emotional Intelligence is all about recognizing and managing emotions in ourselves and others. It is a critical and interrelated ‘subset’ of emotional health along with mental intelligence and other lesser known ‘intelligences’: body intelligence, social intelligence and spiritual intelligence.

Emotional health ‘wraps around’ all these concepts, delving deeper into the ways in which each of us relates to, engages with and affects others and the world around us.

In the following pages we will share with you our definition of emotional health. We will then outline the three core principles of emotional health that we at Global Leadership Foundation work with in developing emotional health in individuals, organisations and communities. We will also consider emotional health from the perspective of a leader, whether that leader be parent to president. To finish, we will tell you a bit about the work that Global Leadership Foundation does, and offer some more ways of engaging with the journey of developing emotional health. We hope you will find this introduction useful and insightful.



Emotional Health

Emotional health is a state of enhanced wellbeing created through highly conscious choices and practices.

It is characterised by a person's ability to make mindful, constructive and respectful decisions and choices in every situation they find themselves in. A person with a high level of emotional health takes personal responsibility for the way in which they relate to and engage with others and the world around them.

Emotionally healthy people are conscious of themselves – their thoughts, their emotions and their behaviours – and the impact they have on others. They are able to recognise and overcome the various influences and constraints that they experience (either from others or themselves) through the choices they make and the practices they use.

If this sounds confusing (or daunting), we encourage you to stick with us. In the following pages we will outline the three main ideas that sit at the core of emotional health. These are relatively simple concepts in themselves, and taken together will give you a good initial understanding of emotional health.

Presence and Whole Body Thinking

It is commonly believed that all our thinking is done by our brain alone, however, ancient eastern philosophy – supported by modern neuroscience – teaches us that clear, effective thinking is actually achieved using the ‘whole body’.

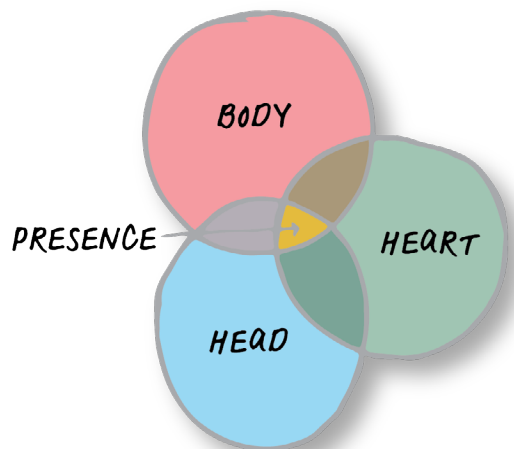
You’re probably familiar with the sort of clear thinking we’re talking about, though perhaps not at work, and not all of the time. The most common times we think in this way are at peaceful times – times when we are sitting in the sun, walking through a forest or on a beach, playing with our children or literally ‘smelling the roses’. It’s thinking that, somewhat counterintuitively, doesn’t feel like thinking at all. Sportspeople sometimes call this thinking being ‘in the zone’. Others call it ‘flow’ or ‘presence’ (the term we tend to use).

In the information era, most people spend very little time being ‘present’. Rather, our thoughts operate a bit like Twitter or Facebook: a never-ending stream of notes, recollections, to dos, ideas and inspirations. Time moves quickly as the mind flutters from one thought to the next. If you’ve ever had a day that you looked back on wondering where it went, wondering why you can hardly remember what

happened, you know what we’re talking about.

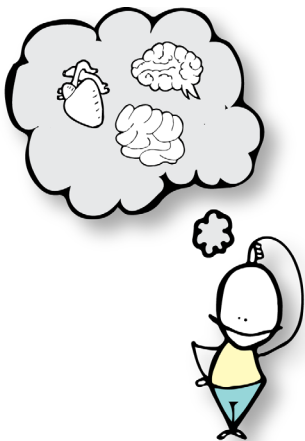
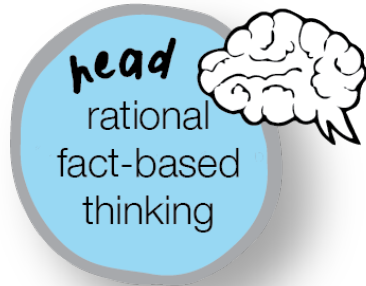
In life generally, but particularly in the workplace, this kind of rapid-fire thinking can make it difficult to be effective. It can be hard to focus on what is important, engage and enable others, and work to achieve what is expected. When you are surrounded by mental and/or physical clutter, it is hard to see your organisation and the world around you with clarity.

‘Whole body’ thinking – presence – is very different to this. It is thinking that balances three ‘centres’: head, heart and body.



Put very simply: 'head thinking' is rational, fact-based thinking; 'heart thinking' is thinking with feeling; and 'body thinking' is thinking based on what we often call 'gut feel'. Each of us is capable of thinking in all three of these ways. However, in the process of developing a personality, we tend to lean more strongly towards one of the three, which then becomes our primary filter for perceiving what we think is reality. We have a tendency to trust the thoughts that come from our preferred centre over others. Conversely, we find ourselves mistrusting or avoiding what the other centres are telling us.

Can you identify which of the three centres you lean towards yourself? 'Presence', or being 'in the zone', is something we achieve when we manage to balance our thinking around all three of these centres.



Personal Responsibility

Imagine you are in the car, driving along happily, when from out of nowhere someone cuts dangerously in front of you. You are forced to brake quickly to avoid an accident. How would you react? Like most people you would probably react in one of the traditional ways: a heavy hand on the horn, a tirade of abuse, the flashing of headlights, or all three of the above.



This typical reaction to a typical situation is a classic example of what we call an 'automatic response'. It's a 'default' behaviour: we don't consciously think about honking, swearing or flashing headlights – we just do it.

Now think about how, at some time in the past, you've approached a conversation about your performance with a manager you didn't get along with. Did you go in with an open mind, or were you on the defensive from the word 'go'? Did you find yourself fairly quickly defending yourself, regardless of what the manager said? Most of us have been in this situation at some stage.



What is happening in this situation is very similar to what is happening in the road-rage scenario. The difference in the workplace is that instead of horn-honking, the automatic response to being challenged or criticised is defensiveness, denial, blame or justification.

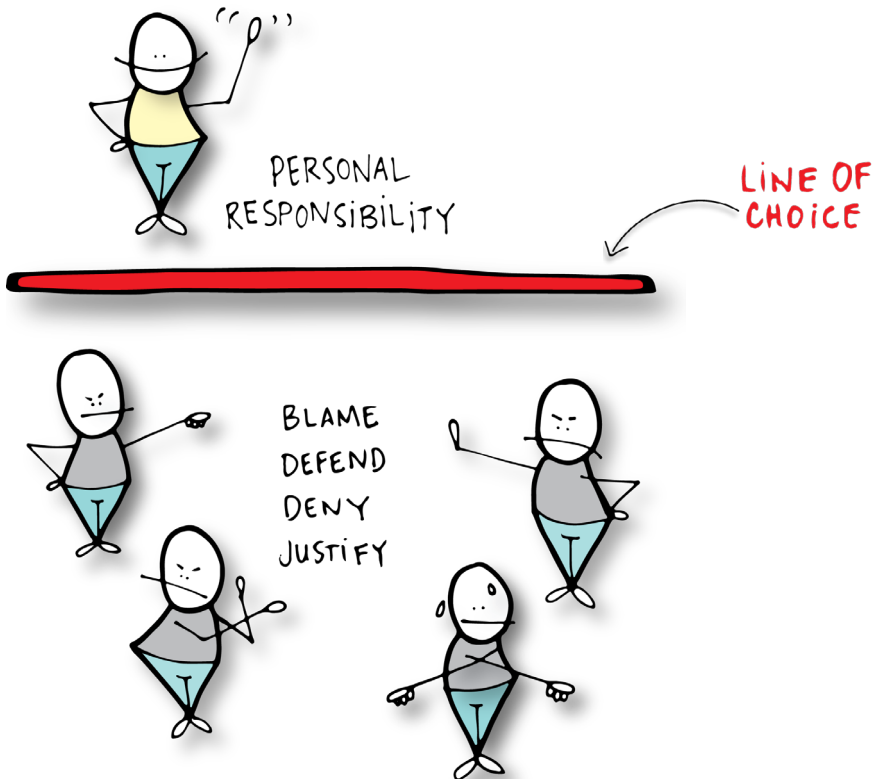
In both these cases – the car and the workplace – there's a good chance that, on later reflection, you recognise that your behaviour was ultimately unnecessary and unhelpful and probably not the best choice you could have made at the time. But you also wonder whether it is really possible to avoid these situations. After all, the responses are automatic, aren't they?

The truth is that it is possible to change your responses to both these situations, but doing so can require a substantial amount of work.

The first step is to understand what is going on here.

In our work we draw a line – the ‘line of choice’ – between the default, automatic responses to challenging situations (typically denial, blame, justification or defensiveness) and the more emotionally healthy option of a thoughtful and constructive response to them. When we do the latter, we are taking personal responsibility – not for the situation itself but for the way we react to the situation.

We say that automatic responses are ‘below the line’ while constructive, personally responsible responses are ‘above the line’.



Notice that we use the word ‘choice’ here. For ultimately there is a personal choice to be made between operating above or below the line, even though it may not feel like it as our hand hits the horn or the excuses start flowing.

Making that choice requires us to activate our ‘inner observer’ before enacting our automatic response, catching ourselves in the act. Achieving this in everyday situations takes some training and practice, especially when you consider that making the choice has to be done very quickly. American psychotherapist and author Tara Bennett-Goleman calls it the ‘magic quarter second’: the time between when our brain absorbs a situation and our body reacts to it.

Some of that training and practice we get from life in general. As we ‘grow up’, we tend to learn to take more personal responsibility than we did when we were young. In practice, however, the vast majority of us only take personal responsibility for our behaviour and our responses some of the time, even as adults. At other times – when that other driver cuts us off, for instance – we slip below the line quite easily.

Spending some time below the line – defending, blaming, justifying – is quite normal. The challenge is to increase your awareness of these responses and, over time, to choose healthier ones more often. In other words, to constantly increase the amount of time you spend being present and ‘above the line’. Achieving that requires a high level of awareness about yourself and the way you see your interactions with others.

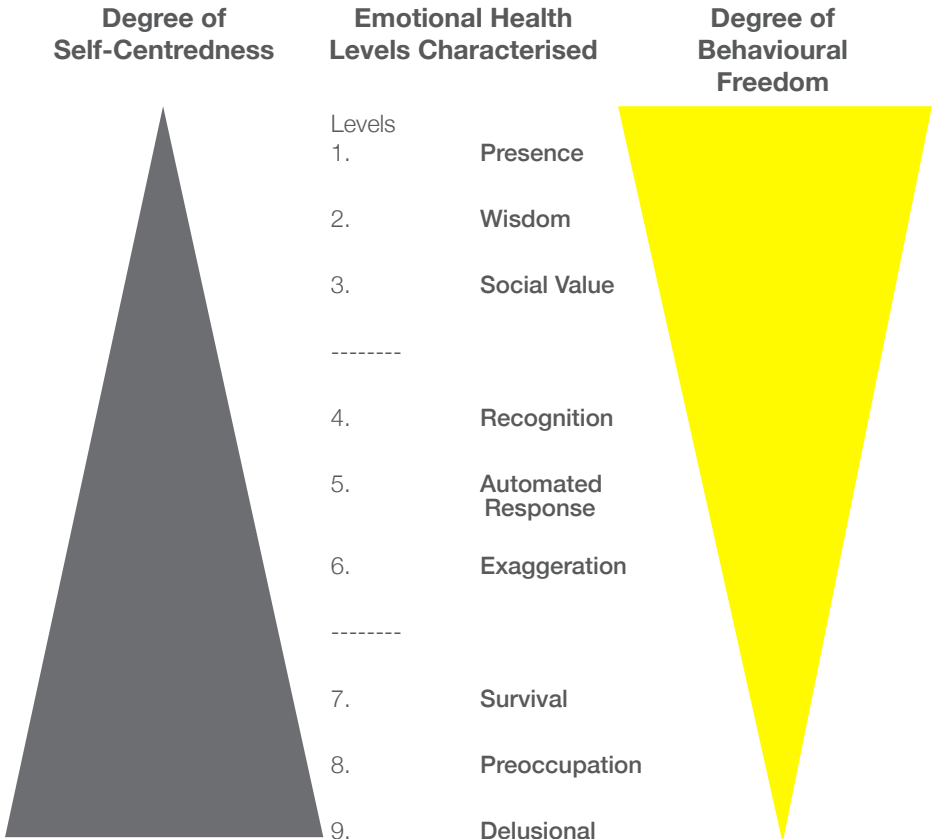
Understanding this idea of operating above or below the line leads us to the larger concept of ‘emotional health levels’.



Emotional Health Levels

The concept of 'emotional health levels' takes the previous notion of personal responsibility and 'above and below the line' a few steps further. Understanding it will establish an important behavioural framework that will help you on your journey as you develop your emotional health.

Emotional health levels are illustrated in the diagram below (adapted from the work of Don Riso and Russ Hudson (1999).



The way we like to explain this is to start in the middle and then describe the differences we see as we move up and down from there. Later we'll provide a little detail on each level.

Let's take a hypothetical person who is centred at level 5 on this diagram (we would say this person has an emotional health level of 5). This is the level which would be represented by the Australian population in general.

Our person at this level will exhibit a range of behaviours in response to the various situations he or she confronts every day. Notionally, many of their responses will be automated – 'below the line' responses of blame, denial and justification. The other behaviours will still tend to be less than effective, coming from "self-talk" that keeps our person at level 5 feeling ok.

What this means in terms of our diagram is that this person is about half-way up the 'self-centredness' pyramid: they display quite a degree of self-centredness, but it could be worse. They are also about half-way down the 'behavioural freedom' inverse pyramid: sometimes they have the emotional freedom to choose their response to a situation (i.e. we might say they 'think before they act'); most

of the time they don't have this freedom (i.e. their response is automatic). Again, there is room to improve, but it could be quite a lot worse.

As our diagram illustrates, the top and bottom of the range of emotional health levels represent extremes in self-centredness and behavioural freedom.

A person with an extremely low level of emotional health (level 9) will display automated, 'below the line' responses to virtually every situation they encounter. They are self-centred all the time; they have little or no behavioural freedom. They are never 'present'. People at this level are often fixated, delusional and self-destructive, and are generally under medical and/or psychiatric care (or should be).

The person with a very high level of emotional health (level 1) is completely open, well balanced and liberated from any degree of self-centredness. With complete behavioural freedom, they are able to make mindful decisions about virtually every situation they encounter and take personal responsibility ('above the line') for their responses. People like this almost define the term 'presence' with their

clarity of thought. They are able to access the highest of qualities, such as compassion and deep caring, with ease. They lead by the highest of examples in all aspects of their lives.

People with these extremes of emotional health are rare – at both ends. As mentioned, most people would operate at or around level 5. Only with a lot of dedication do we find people moving to level 3 or above.

For most of us, our goal would be to increase our emotional health level over time, regardless of where we are starting. Those who move up the emotional health levels over time are better able to see other perspectives of the world they live in; they start to understand the assumptions that their own world view is built on. As they do this, they better appreciate that the coping strategies and defence mechanisms they have been using are holding back their personal growth. More and more, they have the presence to ‘observe’ their own behaviours and responses, identifying areas of behaviour that could be improved and consciously planning to make these improvements.

In terms of the personal responsibility concept, moving up the emotional

health levels means spending more time ‘above the line’, and less time below it.

Descriptions of each of the nine levels can be found in the appendix at the end of this booklet.

Leadership and Emotional Health Levels

While the concept of emotional health levels can be applied to any individual, it gains even greater potency when it is applied to someone in a leadership role, whether that person be leading a nation, running an organisation, coaching a sporting team or raising children. (The discussion that follows focuses on the context of organisational leadership but the principles are applicable to most leadership situations.)

Almost by definition, a good leader needs to display a minimum level of self-centredness (after all, it’s about the organisation, not themselves) and maximum behavioural freedom (in order to make considered decisions rather than automatic or knee-jerk ones).

Leaders are expected to be both compassionate and caring as well as decisive and strong: doing this requires a high level of emotional health. We find that leaders from Level 4 and above drive positive emotions in their workplace; they create resonance by inspiring others through the creation of a genuinely shared vision, then coaching them to be all that they can be as they work towards achieving that vision.



Increasing Your Emotional Health

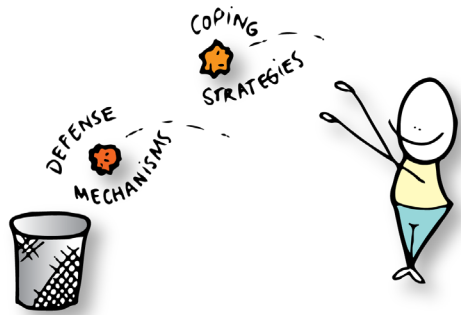
Moving up the emotional health levels requires more than acknowledging that this is 'a good thing to do'. It cannot be achieved by simply knowing what the levels are.

Fundamental to improving your emotional health is becoming aware of your automated responses and their impact on others; understanding what drives and motivates your behaviour and why this is the case; and consciously choosing, and taking, development paths that move you towards 'presence'. In short, this means taking ever greater personal responsibility and becoming more effective at 'whole body thinking'. These steps are all part of the emotional health journey.

Increasing your emotional health will reflect your ability to 'vertically' develop, that is, to 'internally improve'. As you increase your emotional health you will be better able to see other perspectives of the world you live in and start to understand the assumptions that your own world-view is built on.

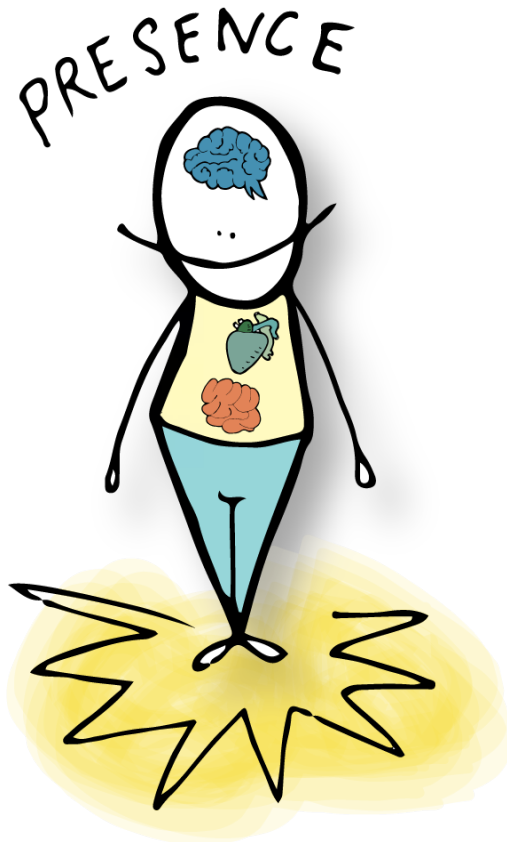
In this sense, increasing your emotional health can be self-fulfilling in part: as you find yourself with a higher level of emotional health, you will be more aware and better placed to take

the next step. As you do this, you will better and better appreciate that the coping strategies and defence mechanisms you have been using are not serving you well and in fact have been holding back your personal growth.



More and more you will have your 'inner observer' activated. You will appraise your own behaviours and responses, identifying areas of behaviour that could be improved and consciously planning your path towards these improvements. This may feel counterintuitive at times, yet you will become better at managing the ambiguity of the situation and choose new ways of engaging.

The path to increasing emotional health through vertical development is very different to the more common 'horizontal' approach to relating and engaging, which is about building skills and competencies. Vertical development is about being increasingly aware of the impact you have in relating to and engaging with others. It is also about taking personal responsibility in making conscious choices (through the behaviours you demonstrate) that strengthen these relationships.



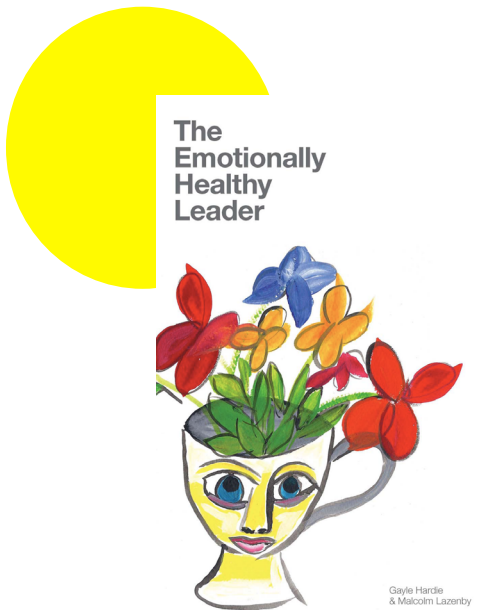
Continuing On with Emotional Health

We hope you have found this introduction useful. There are many ways to engage with emotional health further.

To learn more about emotional health you can purchase our book, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, here online at:

To discuss having Global Leadership Foundation work with you or your organisation, please visit our website:

Or you can contact us directly on +61 417 036 634 or leaders@globalleadershipfoundation.com



Appendix: Emotional Health Descriptors

The following are brief descriptions of typical behaviours displayed at each of the nine emotional health levels. Remember that increasing emotional health is represented by moving to a level with a lower number: level 1 represents the highest level of emotional health, and level 9 the lowest.

Level 1 – Presence

At this level a person has a quiet mind and is fully in touch with the present moment or the ‘now’. They are happiness. They have total behavioural freedom. They are ‘present’ in all they do – each moment they are in is the most important and they are fully available to it.

Level 2 – Wisdom

At this level a person has long periods of being ‘present’, however there are still moments when they experience a ‘default’ response rather than making a conscious choice. They are able to integrate their experience, knowledge and life’s learnings and lead by example in ways that inspire and motivate others.

Level 3 – Social Value

At this level, a person has a high degree of balance in their life and, for the most part, moves their concerns to others and broader social interests. On reaching this level, they lose most of their self-centredness, finding an almost natural tendency to embrace the ‘greater good’ for their community/communities. They increase the number of opportunities to be ‘present’ and further understand how to use their ‘inner observer’ to further raise their own consciousness.

Level 4 – Recognition

A person moving to this level from level 5 starts to recognise that they have choices with all of their behaviours and begins to observe them on a more regular basis. Their level of consciousness increases as they begin to observe themselves more often. They also start to recognise that they can start to create moments of ‘presence’ under certain circumstances, however they also still use, and find it easy to fall back into, past defence mechanisms and coping strategies and need to constantly work at moving away from them.

Level 5 – Automated Response

At this level a person is dominated by a range of automated responses to what is occurring around them. These responses are mostly defensive and are about controlling their environment (including the people in it) in order to get their perceived needs met. There are still times when they make decisions about their behaviours, however the automated responses tend to take over in the moment.

Level 6 – Exaggeration

At this level a person is to more 'demonstrative' in their defences than a person at level 5. Their behaviours are exaggerated as they over-compensate in response to their internal conflicts and anxieties. The majority of their responses occur automatically, without thinking or from their mind taking over from a distorted perspective.

Level 7 – Survival

At this level a person's internal feelings become intolerable as they start to realise that their defence mechanisms are not working. They tend to employ a survival tactic as a self-protective response. They have started to lose all control over making reasonable choices and become fixated on the survival tactic they have chosen.

Level 8 – Preoccupation

At this level a person starts to lose touch with reality, and their thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaviours all become severely distorted. They are out of control. This is considered to be a full pathological state.

Level 9 – Delusional

At this level a person is delusional, out of touch with reality and willing to destroy others and themselves. This includes states of extreme psychosis where they are totally uncontrollable and unreasonable. Their mind obsessions take over their life completely.

