

## **SECTION EIGHT**

**WHY DO BRILLIANT PEOPLE BELIEVE NONSENSE?  
BECAUSE THEY FAIL TO HARNESS THEIR PASSIONS**

CHAPTER 24

**THEY'RE OVERWHELMED  
BY THEIR EMOTIONS AND PASSIONS**

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*"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion."*

— Dale Carnegie

**Emotions and the Teen Mind**

**A**s I write this chapter, I'm reeling from the senseless death of a vibrant, promising young lady who meant a lot to me. She didn't make it to age 25.

Haley had everything going for her—bright, attractive, personable, ever radiating an infectious energy. If I could bend time, I'd go back to that first day she was offered heroin and ask, "What's going through your mind?" I want to know what hijacked her decision-making skills, making one of the most addictive, destructive drugs known to humans look like a great idea.

Since I can't bend time, I'll never know for certain. But I can discover some of the common ways that people allow their emotions to hijack their reasoning. I can also learn strategies for more clear-headed thinking. To find the answers, I turned to some experts in psychology.

**The Teen Brain: A Work in Progress**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, teen brains haven't fully matured. They're still under construction. This could, in part, explain the teen years (and early 20s) being fraught with dangers, including high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, crime, and death by injury.

To better understand brain development, scientists scanned the brains of children and followed up with scans as they matured. Their conclusion? Until we're in our early 20s (some develop later and some earlier) we're not working with a fully developed brain.

Significantly, the parts of the brain that mature last are those that allow us to control our impulses and plan ahead. The connection of these functions with making rational decisions is obvious. To a teen mind—on an impulse and with little or no thought for the future—heroin or burglary or a motorcycle race on a busy Los Angeles street might seem like great ideas for an

evening of fun with friends.

**Think!**

If you're in your teens or early 20s, what implications might this have for making better decisions?

To the high school teen or young college student who's reading this, a couple of implications for life stand out:

- Watch who you hang around.
- Run some of your ideas by responsible adults.

As many success gurus have recommended, "You can't soar with eagles if you hang out with turkeys." Or as basketball great Kareem Abdul Jabaar put it, "Don't let those who are going nowhere influence your opinions."

If you're with your friends one night when they all decide on a whim to try heroin ("Come on, don't be a wuss!"), the emotional, thrill-seeking part of your brain may overwhelm your not-yet-fully-developed impulse inhibitor and your life may take a dramatic turn for the worse.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning running ideas by respected adults, Solomon suggested that "in an abundance of counselors there is safety." Even if you don't consult them, just thinking "What would my parents (or adults I look up to) think about this decision?" can help you to think more rationally, beyond the emotion of the moment. Until your brain's clicking on all cylinders (or until all the cylinders are fully developed), don't fully trust what it's telling you.

Below, we'll talk about other strategies for keeping our emotions and impulses from overriding our reason; but first, let's explore the *adult* brain, which is often hijacked by emotions as well.

## **Emotions and the Adult Mind**

### **America's Most Innovative Company**

If you were a high achieving college graduate in the 1990s, looking for a growing, exciting, respected company to work for, Enron would have likely made your short list. And if you were an investor, buying Enron stock seemed to be a no brainer. An innovator in selling natural gas and energy, their stock grew by 311 percent from 1990 to 1998. But that was just the warm-up. As they kept diversifying into other industries, in 1999 their stock skyrocketed by an astounding 56 percent, then 87 percent in 2000. The top three agencies that rate companies assured the public of their credibility by giving Enron glowing ratings as a reputable, safe investment, well into 2001.<sup>2</sup>

For six consecutive years, from 1996 to 2001, Enron was crowned "America's Most Innovative

Company" by *Fortune Magazine*. In the year 2000, Enron made *Fortune's* list of best companies to work for in America. It had become our nation's seventh largest corporation and was the darling of business publications and investors.

No wonder the world stood aghast when in December of 2001, the same year it was declared "America's Most Innovative Company," it declared bankruptcy. Its stock dropped from its former high of \$90 per share to 26 cents a share. Careers died. Leaders were sentenced to prison. Those heavily invested lost their life savings. Their vice chairman committed suicide.<sup>3</sup>

What went wrong?

Enron's leaders had no lack of academic brilliance and education. Just look at the intellectual credentials of three of the highest ranking officials, who were later sentenced to prison:

- **Ken Lay**, founder, chairman and CEO - PhD in economics.
- **Jeff Skilling**, president and chief operating officer - MBA from Harvard Business School, graduated in the top five percent of his class. Skilling said that in his admissions interview to Harvard he was asked, "Are you smart?" To which he replied, "I'm f\*\*\*\*\* smart."<sup>4</sup>
- **Andrew Fastow**, chief financial officer – MA degree in business administration from Northwestern University.

Both within Enron and to the watching world, they were the smartest of the smart—intimidatingly smart.

But if you read various accounts of Enron's fall, certain words and phrases keep turning up, such as in a review in a respected accounting journal: "greed," caught up in "market euphoria," "arrogance," "intensely competitive."<sup>5</sup>

Those are interesting words for an accounting journal—words that are more emotional than intellectual. In fact, I never saw a study of Enron calling their leaders "intellectually incompetent" or "dumb." One of the most respected accounts of Enron is titled "The Smartest Guys in the Room." So how did such smart guys end up in jail? Why did they fail so miserably? Somehow, they allowed their emotions to hijack their brains and as a result commit crimes so audacious that any level-headed person should have known better. Their greed and arrogance brought them down.

True, Enron exploited accounting loopholes and outright lied and deceived the world about their true activities and financial state. But look deeper. *Why* did they exploit and lie and deceive? Perhaps constructing a brief narrative would clarify the impact of emotions and make their journey to the dark side more understandable.

Their arrogance and overconfidence led them to believe that they were so smart and talented that they could pull Enron out of any mess, no matter how bad things got. Since some of their acquisitions and projects were hemorrhaging hundreds of millions of dollars, they desperately

needed to hide this from the public until they got it under control. After all, as long as their stock kept growing in value, they could leverage it to offset their losses. But if the public saw their great losses and lost faith in them, their stock would take a dive, potentially pulling them under. Since desperate times call for desperate measures, their leaders felt that creative accounting for the short haul could be justified, just until things got back on track.

Unfortunately for Enron, the leaders were not only deceiving the public, but appear to have been deceiving themselves. Skilling once told *BusinessWeek* that he'd "never not been successful at work or business, ever."<sup>6</sup> No wonder he was overconfident and felt he could fix anything that was wrong with Enron, even till the very end. As researchers McLean and Elkind reported, "It is difficult to find any evidence that Skilling...has ever admitted that he failed at Enron. Not even to himself."<sup>7</sup>

### **From Enron to Us**

Today we look with disgust at leaders such as Lay, Skilling and Fastow, the poster children for corporate greed. But seen apart from their positions of unique power and influence, perhaps they're not that different from the rest of us. After all, these are men who took vacations with their children and involved themselves in the community. Fastow, when he wasn't cooking accounting books or awarding himself millions of dollars in bonuses, seemed to be "the picture of a devoted family man." He regularly left work to spend long lunches with his wife, whom he adored. Each week, he calendared a couple of hours for "dad's night with the boys."<sup>8</sup> They are people, more like you and me than we'd like to imagine.

So shouldn't we admit that we're all tempted by the same drives and emotions that brought down Enron and caused Haley to try heroin?

Most of us are at least a bit overconfident; we tend to assume that we'll never fail at business or become alcoholics or drug addicts. We have a strong tendency to explain away our failures as due to other people's failures—a sorry teacher or inept boss or clueless coach. Yet, while studies find that most of us are about average (obviously), we like to think of ourselves as above average, resulting in emotions that lead us to imagine we can get away with things that average people can't, like:

- turning in a paper for class that's partly stolen from another student or author.
- obtaining a copy of the exam from a friend who has the same professor in an earlier class.
- not reporting under the table cash payments to the IRS.
- finding creative ways to bolster profits on paper to keep our stock strong.

I recall one of my college English professors who admitted to us that she wanted so badly to be valedictorian of her class at Ohio State that she dated her closest rival, solely for the purpose of distracting him from studying for tests.

Why do we succumb to the strong emotions that accompany lying, cheating and stealing? I suppose that, like the Enron guys, many of us think the ends justify the means. Like the Enron guys, we're not planning to be corrupt for the rest of our lives; we just need to bend the rules a bit to get through this class. We're just competitive enough to justify it by imagining that everybody's doing it. We're arrogant enough to believe we can get away with it. And we're greedy enough to think we deserve to graduate with honors, even if we had to lie and cheat and steal to get there. "After college," we tell ourselves, "we'll put the unethical shortcuts behind us and make decisions on the basis of pure reason and upstanding motives."

But isn't that the way the Enron leaders probably thought during their college years?<sup>9</sup> I doubt they planned from the start to allow their baser emotions to cloud their reason. Cutting corners was supposed to be just a temporary thing. But with practice, it became their character.

Beyond succeeding in business and resisting drugs, controlling emotions is essential to our everyday success—realizing that envy is hurting your relationship with that star athlete on your team, realizing that your uber competitive nature is leading you to run over people, understanding that your out-of-control temper is impacting your decisions and your relationships with family, realizing that your arrogance often leads you to take irrational risks.

So how can we rein in our emotions? Here are some ideas.

## **How to Keep Emotions from Clouding our Thinking**

### **1. Don't imagine that "smart" protects you from letting emotions run away with you.**

In the case of Enron, "smart" merely enabled leaders to justify their emotions and corrupt methods, using their skills to deceive. So keep your ego in check.<sup>10</sup>

### **2. Recognize the vulnerabilities of your stage of life.**

Having a not-quite-adult mind can lead to stupid decisions, if you trust it implicitly and fail to get objective input.

### **3. Recognize your emotions and passions.**

Skilling and Lay never seemed to realize that their overconfidence was deceiving them. In late October of 2001, a bit over a month from declaring bankruptcy, Lay spoke at a meeting open to all employees. He insisted that Enron had consistently done the right thing and promised that they'd make it through fine. By this time, his employees knew better. A few minutes into the Q & A period, someone handed Lay a written question, which he read aloud:

"I would like to know if you are on crack. If so that would explain a lot. If not, you may want to start because it's going to be a long time before we trust you again."<sup>11</sup>

As seemed to be the case with Skilling and Lay, we're often blind to how far our emotions have

taken our reasoning for a ride. As we'll see below, we simply must open ourselves to the candid criticism of others if we ever hope to discover our emotional shortcomings.

When I was involved in rehabbing foreclosure properties, experts in the field warned me that rule number one for succeeding in this business was: "Don't fall in love with your properties!" Real estate investors who allow their emotions to run wild end up spending so much money beautifying a property that they end up losing money.

Critical thinking guru Edward De Bono helps people to separate out emotions from facts by asking them to imagine that they're putting on various thinking hats, one at a time. Let's say you're trying to decide whether to accept a new position in Denver, which would involve moving your family from Los Angeles. First, suggests De Bono, put on your white hat, which represents purely facts and figures—no emotions allowed! Later, emotions will be considered, but asking all interested parties to start with listing facts and figures can help us to be more objective. If you absolutely love the Rocky Mountains and Denver Broncos, it might be difficult to stay objective!

#### **4. If you're inflamed, calm down.**

Surely you've heard reports of people killing each other over a road rage incident.

Just imagine: road construction and two accidents have turned your hour commute to college into two hours. You're late for your midterm. You finally see a clearing, but someone cuts you off, almost causing an accident. Enraged, you lay on your horn and yell "Moron!" The other driver pulls off the road and waves you over.

This is exactly how fist fights and homicides break out between otherwise intelligent people. Days later, perhaps in jail with a black eye and an act of violence on your record, you can't believe what happened.

So if you're discussing an important issue and you feel the anger building, take a break. Count to 10. Leave the room till you can regain control. Table the discussion for a better day when everyone's more rested. Nobody can make wise decisions when anger has hijacked your thinking faculties.<sup>12</sup>

#### **5. Open yourself to other views.**

Skilling and Lay appeared to be increasingly out of touch with their company. Surrounding themselves with people who thought like they thought and dismissing contrary input, they could increasingly live in a fantasy world of their own making.<sup>13</sup>

Although they were billions of dollars in debt, they'd tell themselves and the world, "We're doing great! I've never been more optimistic about Enron's future!" As long as they ignored contrary opinion, they could believe what they desperately wanted to believe.

Astoundingly, Ken Lay conducted his personal investments eerily similar to the way he conducted Enron's finances. As a result, although he had made millions of dollars over the years through Enron, he had also massively borrowed in order to make various investments,

many of which were tied to the health of Enron's stock. He ignored his advisors, who strongly encouraged him to diversify. By January of 2001, he owed \$95 million, and was struggling to pay his creditors.

"Other views" are what we get from respected colleagues and friends. When I resist getting input, I sometimes discover that it's because I really, really want to take a certain path, but suspect that if I get counsel, they'll warn me against that path.

## **6. Establish formal accountability.**

This makes the last point—"getting other views"—a formal, regular part of your life and business.

Coach Joe Gibbs was one of the most successful professional football coaches ever. But even as his team competed in a Super Bowl, he agonized over his millions of dollars of debt. His personal finances were in shambles as a result of investments gone awry. The investments seemed wise when people presented them—building racquetball complexes when the sport was very popular, developing neighborhoods in an oil rich area while oil was booming. But they blew up on him.

To dig his way out and to make better decisions, people counseled him to run future decisions by his wife and a board of wise counselors. Establishing formal accountability turned his life around.<sup>14</sup>

## **7. Note when you're attacking people rather than their ideas.**

Profitable discussions stick to the data and the reasoning. But people issues provoke emotions that can deflect from the real issues.

At Enron, rather than listening to naysayers, the leadership dismissed them. They would rationalize negative input:

- "They're just short sellers out to make us look bad!"
- "That accountant just has it in for us!"

Rather than look seriously into the negative data people were uncovering, they labeled naysayers as enemies and ignored them.

One of my favorite college presidents used to say, "I consider my enemies as my best friends." He knew that if he couldn't answer their objections, he might be wrong. They were often more willing to point out his faults than his friends.<sup>15</sup>

## **8. Develop cultures of clear thinking and integrity, rather than ruthless competition.**

Enron's leaders were competitive risk takers, and they developed a culture of high competition among their employees. According to one reflective article,

"Enron's corporate culture encouraged rampant, ruthless internal competition, driving otherwise decent human beings to take risks of a kind they knew were dangerous and wrong. Asked to choose between losing face and losing shareholder's money, self-image won out—as it always will. If companies foster internal competition, they can and should expect to see even the finest employees' values fall by the wayside."<sup>16</sup>

Many of their employees were rated on a scale of one to five. "One" meant they were making serious money for Enron. They were showered with benefits and honor. "Five" meant they were close to being fired. Such an environment promotes, not teamwork and camaraderie and open learning, but hiding your best ideas, jealousy of the big winners, and winning at all costs. This generated a culture of fierce competition, whereby "immediate gratification was prized above long-term potential."<sup>17</sup>

### **9. Recognize (or flee from!) situations that prey on your emotions.**

Public auctions can prey on the emotions associated with winning and losing and competition. Offers of big money can corrupt. (Enron was paying Arthur Anderson, one of our nation's most trusted accounting firms, over a million dollars a month. No wonder they were willing to bend the rules. As a result of the scandal, the firm no longer exists.) The promise of money, power and prestige has turned many a great mind to mush. Lack of sleep increases our susceptibility to impulsive behavior.<sup>18</sup>

My wife and I determined to never make a purchase the day of a presentation, since it was typically a high pressure sell. This little practice saved us from many poor decisions.

Drinking and certain drugs (such as Meth) make people overconfident. Perhaps Haley was influenced by a drug or alcohol when she was first offered heroin. Under the influence of meth, she might have felt invulnerable.

### **10. Don't be intimidated.**

Have you ever been in a conversation where you really didn't understand what someone was talking about it, but in order to save face, you had to act like you understood? I have. Let's call it "intellectual intimidation," or "intellectual bullying." Enron used fancy language and vague terminology to hide the fact that they were billions of dollars in debt. Thus, their public accounting disclosures were described as "mind numbingly complex."<sup>19</sup>

So why did the banks that were lending them money, the rating agencies, and the stockholders, all of whom had the duty to analyze the company, put their faith in Enron when they couldn't have possibly understood how Enron was actually making money?

I'd suggest that, in part, they were intimidated by "the smartest guys in the room" and were influenced by not wanting to appear ignorant. It would be more than a bit humbling for a great investment company like Merrill Lynch to send someone to Enron and confess, "I've read your accounting sheets, but I still can't for the life of me understand how you're making money. Show me in simple language your profits and losses on a sheet of paper."

Of course, the smart guys at Enron would respond that it can't be put that simply. "After all, we're dealing here with cutting edge deals that involve cutting edge accounting." Then, they'd launch into a discussion that nobody could fully understand. No wonder they could intimidate and appear to be "the smartest guys in the room."<sup>20</sup>

Warren Buffett became the world's greatest investor in part by making sure he understood how the companies he bought were generating their income, and assessing whether or not their approach was sustainable. Although Enron's stock was flying high, although the ratings agencies gave it the highest ratings, although banks were willing to lend them money, although they were audited by one of the top accounting firms in the country, none of this would matter in the least to Warren Buffett if he couldn't clearly understand how Enron was making the money it was claiming to make.

Thus, a Stanford document on Enron references Buffett:

When asked about why he didn't invest in dot-com companies, Warren Buffett responded, "I have an old-fashioned belief that I should only expect to make money in things I understand. And when I say understand, I mean understand what the economics of the business are likely to look like 10 years from now."<sup>21</sup>

If all investors followed Buffett's advice, companies that failed to provide sufficient information for investors to understand their financial position would find it very difficult to raise money from the investing public.

Buffett's mentor, Benjamin Graham, deserves quoting again in this context: "You are neither right nor wrong because the crowd disagrees with you. You are right because your data and reasoning are right."<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Whether we're making personal or business decisions, our passions and emotions can hijack our thinking. Those who are unaware of their influence, or allow them to take charge, will often find themselves making foolish and destructive decisions.

## Think Different

So far this chapter has been largely negative—how people screw up by letting emotions get out of control. But there's a positive side to our emotional states. Let's explore how some of these potentially negative emotions can have a positive side.

First, the developmental state of the teen brain offers advantages as well as dangers. As the National Institutes of Health explains:

"Scientists emphasize that the fact that the teen brain is in transition doesn't mean it is somehow not up to par. It is different from both a child's and an adult's in ways that may equip youth to make the transition from dependence to independence. The capacity for

learning at this age, an expanding social life, and a taste for exploration and limit testing may all, to some extent, be reflections of age-related biology."

"Research findings on the brain may also serve to help adults understand the importance of creating an environment in which teens can explore and experiment while helping them avoid behavior that is destructive to themselves and others."<sup>23</sup>

So getting input from young people, if adults will only listen, could be of great value to innovation, precisely because they're thinking differently at that age.<sup>24</sup>

Second, the hyper-competitive bent of Enron's leaders wasn't all bad. Competition can be a great motivation to success! They simply needed to understand the dangers of competition, provide for themselves checks and balances, and straighten out their moral compasses. We need each other, not just for keeping ourselves in line, but to maximize the creative flow of ideas. But we'll explore more on the positive side of emotions in the next chapter.

## **Flex Your Neurons!**

### **Pursuing the Point of Know Return**

1. Imagine that you worked at Enron. Do you think you'd have likely recognized early on that something was awry, or do you think you'd have been blinded by the heady euphoria of working for such a successful, smart company? Why?
2. Do you consider yourself more *objective*, or more *subjective*, in making decisions? How would your friends and family answer this question regarding you? How might this help or hinder your decision-making?
3. Think of an acquaintance or family member who you believe is overly ruled by emotions. Is there anything that anyone could say or do to help this person make more reasonable decisions? List your best ideas.
4. Think in the realm of your career interest or your current realm of influence. How can you keep from making overly emotional decisions in these realms?
5. If it's a common human tendency, as certainly was the case with Enron, to be "blind to how far our emotions have taken us for a ride," what steps can we take to offset this tendency?
6. If you were about to make a poor decision, is there someone currently in your life (like a close friend or accountability partner) who would challenge you on the decision? If not, how could you take steps to bring such a person into your life?
7. How can we do a better job of harnessing the positive aspects of the teen brain? Many teens are too shy or insecure to share their ideas. How could classes and office meetings be better arranged to encourage a better flow of ideas? (Examples: Meet in smaller groups, like Google? Meet around round tables, rather than lecture-style rooms?)<sup>25</sup>

## **Making It More Personal Practical Takeaways**

What are one or more ideas provoked by this chapter that you can apply to help you think more critically?

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What are one or more ideas that you can apply to help you think more creatively?

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What else do you want to make sure you don't forget?

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## Recommended Trails For the Incurably Curious and Adventurous

1. Do you need a track to run on when making decisions—a method that helps you to consider (not ignore) your emotions, but keeps you from being ruled by them? A leading authority on conceptual thinking, Dr. Edward de Bono, has written a very accessible and practical book to answer this question: *Six Thinking Hats: An essential approach to business management from the creator of lateral thinking.* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1985)



Although he's writing for business leaders, the approach is simple enough to be used by individuals making important decisions. In brief, he recommends thinking through a problem in this sequence:

- **Put on your white hat**, which represents facts, figures and objective information.
- **Put on your red hat**, considering your emotions and feelings.
- **Put on your black hat**, looking at your logical negative thoughts.
- **Put on your yellow hat**, considering only positive, constructive thoughts.
- **Put on your green hat**, incorporating your creativity and new ideas.
- **Put on your blue hat** to organize your thought process, using metacognition to think through the best way to use the information gleaned from donning the other hats.

Read the book to see in more detail how to put this method into practice.

2. Enron certainly failed to think straight in the moral domain. In making good decisions, balancing emotion with reason, it's not only necessary to think through the most *practical* thing to do, but to ask "What's the *right* thing to do?" Harvard professor Michael Sandel helps us to answer that question in his popular book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, reprint edition, 2010).

3. To understand better what went wrong at Enron and to explore this fascinating study in how emotions and reason can go awry in leading a company, read *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*, by Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind (New York: Penguin, updated edition, 2004).

4. Search terms/phrases such as "Dialectical Behavior Therapy" (DBT) and the related concept of "Wise Mind." These approaches to counseling are often studied/employed in connection with helping people with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) to control their emotions in order to make wiser decisions. But the principles can be used by anyone to make wiser decisions. Also search "Cognitive Behavior Therapy" (CBT), which seeks to counterbalance the tendency of some to make decisions based upon overly emotional factors.<sup>26</sup>

## CHAPTER 25

# THEY FAIL TO EMPLOY EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COMMON SENSE

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Warren Buffett on what to look for in choosing a business partner:

*"I think you'll probably start looking for the person that you can always depend on; the person whose ego does not get in his way; the person who's perfectly willing to let someone else take the credit for an idea as long as it worked; the person who essentially won't let you down, who thought straight as opposed to brilliantly."*

— quoted from *Of Permanent Value*

**A**s we near the end of the book, I feel a bit closer to you, since we've travelled so far and explored so many ideas together. So I might as well come out into the open about one of my darker secrets.

I'm a bit of a Trekkie.... There, I said it.

Star Trek began as a 1960's sci-fi TV show, inspiring five subsequent Star Trek TV series, twelve films, and scores of video games. Today, interest in the Star Trek saga continues to grow. The latest (2013) film, *Into Darkness*, earned over \$467 million worldwide, making it the highest-grossing Star Trek film ever.

While I don't attend Star Trek conventions or own a phaser autographed by Sulu or Scottie, I do occasionally find myself asking, "What would First Officer Spock or Captain Kirk do in this situation?" My reasons are very practical and will soon become apparent.

### **What's Your Image of the Supremely Logical, Critical Thinker?**

Spock—the stoic, analytical character played by Leonard Nimoy in the original series—would win any vote by first generation trekkies. He's Mr. Logic. His Vulcan heritage bestowed upon him a mind of rare mathematical and logical genius. If you need a cold, calculated assessment of the data, ask Spock.



In this picture, Spock stands to the left—no smile, no relational warmth, clueless that the

photographer is a beautiful woman who thinks he's cute. Perhaps the camera reminded him of the history of photography, and he's reorganizing that mental file of data as he poses.

"If Spock had been running Enron," some might suggest, "he could have avoided all the emotional nonsense that blinded the leadership—the greed and arrogance and childlike competition. With Spock at the helm, it might be a viable company to this day."

Perhaps that's true, but I fear that those who deprecate all emotions and assume that the most accurate logic is that which most effectively bars emotion from each equation, may find themselves face to face with contrary data of the most troubling sort—Why was *Kirk* the captain of the Starship Enterprise rather than *Spock*?

### Spock's Limitations

A part of people's fascination with *Star Trek* was the diverse, yet complimentary personalities that triggered fascinating interactions. Take McCoy, the physician (far right in the picture). He had deep feelings and thought very relationally—the polar opposite of Spock. (Look at his exuberant smile. He just realized that the photographer is a great friend of his sister.)

Naturally, Spock and McCoy often butted heads in either serious or light-hearted conflict. But Kirk (at center in the picture) had that rare talent for leadership which enabled him to consider the advice of his crew and blend the best of both worlds—logic and emotions—to make wise decisions.

The great value of Spock was that he could evaluate circumstances with pure logic, unclouded by emotional considerations. But his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. He had no emotional intelligence—a severe deficit in understanding how emotions could and should inform his logic.

### How Emotional Intelligence\* Can Enhance Logic

So imagine that a Klingon warship stands between the Starship Enterprise and a colony of people they desperately need to rescue. Listen carefully to a possible exchange:

**\*Emotional Intelligence** = the ability to understand, recognize and deal with emotions, both personally and interpersonally.

**Spock:** "Our firepower far exceeds theirs. Logically, their only option is to allow us through without a fight."

**McCoy:** "Your logic fails to consider that the captain of this particular Klingon vessel has never lost a fight and takes great pride in that he never backs down to anyone. I fully expect that he'd rather die than let us through."

**Kirk:** "If McCoy is right, perhaps we can negotiate a pass in a way that allows the Klingon captain to save face with his crew and continue feeling superior to us."

**Note:** *Both Spock and McCoy are arguing rationally.* They weren't pitting logic against emotions. Rather, McCoy, because of his emotional intelligence, was able to add data to the line of argument that proved crucial to Kirk's handling of the standoff.

Put in a syllogism, Spock argued:

**Premise 1:** If a Klingon warship captain realizes he's outgunned, he'll back off.

**Premise 2:** The captain realizes he's outgunned.

**Therefore:** He'll back off.

Conversely, McCoy argued:

**Premise 1:** If a Klingon warship captain is overconfident and filled with pride, he'll put up a fight even though he's outgunned.

**Premise 2:** This captain is overconfident and filled with pride.

**Conclusion:** He'll put up a fight even though he's outgunned.

Note that both are equally valid arguments—the conclusions logically follow from the premises. Yet McCoy's argument is superior in that he takes into account data provided by emotional intelligence. His argument, if both sound and valid, demonstrates that Spock's first premise errs in that it fails to take into account the Klingon captain's pride. It doesn't mean that McCoy is smarter *in general* than Spock. McCoy is smarter than Spock *at evaluating emotional/relational data*. Spock is smarter *at insuring that any given argument is argued in a valid way*. Both are valuable skills and a good leader understands and draws upon those strengths.

So could Spock have saved Enron? Perhaps. But in a sense, Enron already had its Spock-like mind in Jeff Skilling. People never referred to Skilling as simply "smart." They called him "incandescently brilliant" or "the smartest person I ever met."<sup>1</sup> Here's how his high bandwidth mental processing was described:

"He could process information and conceptualize new ideas with blazing speed. He could instantly simplify highly complex issues into a sparkling, compelling image."

But for all his brilliance, the same authors noted one of his "dangerous blind spots":

"...he didn't really understand people. He expected people to behave according to the imperatives of pure intellectual logic, but of course nobody does that...."

So in Skilling we have high academic intelligence, but low emotional and relational intelligence. From my reading of Enron, that was one of the key factors in its fall.<sup>2</sup>

So let's look at some real life examples of what happens when emotional intelligence is lacking—in business decisions, in science, in arguing for our points of view, and in evaluating the views of others. Reflecting on these, brainstorm some practical ideas for how to add emotional intelligence to your decisions.

## When Emotional Intelligence is Left Out of the Equation

### Lack of Emotional Intelligence Hinders Research and Development

At New York's 1964 World's Fair, Bell Labs' Picturephones were a hit. Visitors could sit in booths and talk to one another while seeing each other, much like we do on Skype today. But in the 1960's such technology was extraordinary, seemingly capturing the essence of future communications.

To most, it seemed obvious that Bell Labs should commit the millions of dollars necessary to develop this technology. After all, businesses could conduct meetings long distance without making people travel. People could see their loved ones when they were far from home. It might even relieve congested cities by allowing people to work from the country.

So they conducted market research, which indicated that most people saw a need for Picturephones in their businesses and almost half perceived a need in their homes. The conclusion of the study? Many people wanted to see who they were talking to.

Unfortunately, researchers apparently failed to clarify whether they wanted others *to see them* as well.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps people, if they were asked a couple of further questions, would consider it preferable to communicate without a visual, such as being able to talk to the boss from home in your pajamas, or without fixing your hair, or without worrying about the baby food splattered on your blouse.

After mega dollars and thousands of hours of people power were spent in development, the Picturephone made its debut in Pittsburgh and Chicago. Astonishingly, after a "vigorous sales campaign" over an 18 month period, Chicago had only 46 customers and Pittsburgh had eight. What happened?

After evaluating the colossal failure, topping their list was the insight that people liked the impersonal aspects of phone calls and didn't think the visual aspect added that much to the conversation. Apparently, the market research had failed to ask questions that sufficiently considered such drawbacks.

Surely it's significant that predicting such human behavior and thinking to ask the most relevant questions in surveys require large doses of emotional intelligence. Perhaps their team of researchers failed to include enough relational thinkers in designing their surveys.<sup>4</sup>

Thus emotional intelligence is critical for helping companies make wise decisions.

### Emotional Intelligence Can Help Determine Which Companies Will Likely Succeed

At a technology conference, I heard an investor and advisor to Silicon Valley start-ups share an insight he'd gleaned from years of consulting and observing which entrepreneurs succeed.

"If someone tells me in essence, 'I've got an idea that's gonna make tons of money!' I don't pay them much attention. But if someone says, 'I've got an idea that's gonna help a lot of people,' I'm all ears. Those startups tend to make it."<sup>5</sup>

If this insight is on target, it's not the kind of insight that's typically highlighted in accounting spreadsheets. Those who know accounting but have no social intelligence might have never noticed this characteristic of successful companies.

The more I read about Enron, I look in vain for the leadership obsessing about how their business plan is going to help so many customers. Instead, I find them obsessing over stock valuations and company growth and slick deals that are likely to make millions of dollars. Customers appear to be viewed, not as people, but as potential sources of revenue. Perhaps, in the final analysis, those who focus obsessively and exclusively on profits fail to realize those profits over the long-haul, since they long ago lost sight of their customers.

Enron wasn't killed by letting *all* emotions and passions influence them. The *right* passions—passions for integrity and passions to serve and passionate concern for people—can greatly enhance the bottom line. Enron was killed by promoting *destructive* passions and emotions (brutal competition, greed, vanity). No wonder the leadership lost all respect and employees began to openly ask of their supposedly brilliant leaders, "Are you on crack?"

Why do bright people—even "The Smartest Guys in the Room"—believe nonsense? Because they fail to reason with emotional intelligence.

## **When Emotional Intelligence Runs Short among Great Thinkers**

Many picture those who've impacted the history of human thought as brilliant individuals who were passionately driven by a pure and sincere quest for truth. But when we look more closely at their written works and peek into their lives, we often find those whose emotional intelligence, or lack thereof, influenced their opinions at least as much as their research and logic.

### **Bertrand Russell**

In the history of philosophy, Russell symbolizes for many a modern day Spock. One of the most prominent and influential philosophers of the 20th century, he was widely considered a great and innovative logician.<sup>6</sup> "For the masses of people all over the world," according to writer Paul Johnston, Russell became "the quintessence, the archetype of the abstract philosopher."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the article on Russell in the venerable *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* paints a picture of a truly great thinker and humanitarian who often got into trouble for fearlessly standing for the truth as he saw it. The committee for the Nobel Prize for Literature described him, in presenting Russell with the award in 1950, as "one of our time's most brilliant spokesmen of rationality and humanity...."<sup>8</sup>

But does an aptitude for abstract logic necessarily lead a person to a purely logical assessment of issues that impact us in real life? Beyond logic and math, Russell pontificated on an

astonishing variety of subjects, including politics, religion, justice, sex, marriage, philosophy, history, education science, peace, and disarmament. Interestingly, some historians and philosophers note that although he possessed a keen understanding of logic, when he wrote his popular essays and books, he seemed to by and large write opinion pieces, without evidence of dispassionately reading and comparing the most studied opinions on the subjects, or of objectively sifting the relevant facts and rigorously testing his conclusions with logic.<sup>9</sup>

Historian Will Durant observed that once Russell came down to earth from his earlier obsession with math and logic, he would "never once make use of the impeccable formulae piled like Pelion upon Ossa in his *Principia Mathematica*."<sup>9.5</sup>

For all his great genius in abstract logic, Russell seemed to lack emotional intelligence. Thus, although he viewed his writings as purely reasonable and factual, he seemed oblivious to how his passions impacted both his reasoning and his choice of data. As one student of Russell summed up his emotional life:

"Russell was not a man who ever acquired extensive experience of the lives most people lead or who took much interest in the view and feelings of the multitude."<sup>10</sup>

According to Russell's daughter, he "always found people difficult."<sup>11</sup> He once said, "I like mathematics because it is *not* human."<sup>12</sup>

He loved theory, but often found difficulty navigating the real stuff of life. According to Paul Johnson,

"no one was more detached from physical reality than Russell. He could not work the simplest mechanical device or perform any of the routine tasks which even the most pampered man does without thinking."<sup>13</sup>

For example, he never could seem to figure out how to make a cup of tea, a skill surely of great practical import for any English gentleman. When his third wife went out of town, she wrote him a few simple steps for making tea.

- Put the kettle of water on a hot plate.
- Wait for it to boil.
- Pour the water into a teapot.
- Add tea leaves.

Simple for most people, but apparently not for Russell. Somehow, even with these simple instructions, he managed to fail miserably at making his cup of tea.<sup>14</sup>

Thus armed with a logic whose premises often failed to take into account common sense and human emotions, he often drew conclusions that more practical and people-oriented folks might roll their eyes at. For example, he saw marriage vows that promised fidelity as a potentially

harmful convention of a superstitious age. Modern marriages, thought Russell, should be "open," allowing people the freedom to "love the one you're with," as songwriter Stephen Stills put it.

Putting this philosophy into practice, he went from wife to wife and affair to affair, seemingly oblivious to the tremendous emotional toll he was exacting from all involved. His unstable home often positioned his children as pawns of the adult parent figures, who tried to pull them over to their side of the squabble *du jour*.

So why couldn't such a brilliant man have predicted the emotional and relational toll that such a lifestyle would exact?<sup>15</sup> Russell's own reflection is telling. All seemed well to him when *he* slept around. But when *his wife* cashed in on the open relationship agreement, he was amazed at how hurt and jealous and unforgiving he became. He didn't like her any more. Astoundingly to Russell, he couldn't get past the strong feelings. In Russell's own words, admitting his lack of emotional intelligence, "Anyone else could have told me this in advance, but I was blinded by theory."<sup>16</sup>

"Blinded by theory."

That would be an interesting thread to follow through Russell's life. His "tragic flaw," said one of his wives as he left her for another, was that he could betray someone he'd loved and apparently show "so little regret." For all his supposed great love and concern for mankind in general (which he expressed in his theories and writings), he seemed to find difficulty loving any specific human (excepting his children) over time.<sup>17</sup>

(An interesting study on emotional intelligence and its impact on intellectuals would be to read Bertrand Russell's autobiography, then read his life as seen through the eyes of his daughter [*My Father, Bertrand Russell*, by Katharine Tait], who was also well educated and a great writer and thinker in her own right, but showed more emotional intelligence than her father.)

## **How Lack of Emotional Intelligence Led Russell Astray**

Let's look at some specifics, each of which demonstrates the problems caused by lack of emotional intelligence. Do you see some of these characteristics in your own thinking?

### **1. An either/or mentality.**

An intellectual with emotional intelligence might ask herself, "If I'm so absolutely certain of my position on this controversial belief, how come so many intelligent, informed people disagree with me? Have I honestly taken the time to fully understand their position and how they arrived at it?" Such an approach assumes enough emotional intelligence to get inside the head of another person—the ability to empathize.

But Russell, in his popular writings, shows little sign of understanding the strongest arguments against his position. Instead, he excelled at setting up and knocking down straw men.

One commentator, speaking of Russell's railings against religion, observes,

"But for the most part he contents himself with shying at Aunt Sallies\*. The serious reader who wants a balanced statement of the pros and cons is best advised to look elsewhere."<sup>18</sup>

\***Shying at Aunt Sallies** = a British phrase for knocking down straw men.

By ignoring the strongest arguments of the other side, he could argue his position as the only sensible position. Yet, seeing only one side of an argument leads to dogmatic, either/or thinking. As his daughter observed:

"He needed certainty, he loved clarity with a passion, and he could not bear any kind of muddled thinking. "Either/or" was much more congenial to him than "both/and" (my favorite); "it is" was better than "it may be"; "the truth is" was preferable to "perhaps."<sup>19</sup> (Parentheses by Russell's daughter)

Thus, Russell was "always an absolutist."<sup>20</sup>

Also impacting this either/or thinking was his temperament, which included a relish for holding contrarian positions. Again according to his daughter Katherine, "he was so used to considering the majority wrong that he felt comfortable only in opposition."<sup>21</sup> Obviously, this emotional tendency would prejudice him against majority views.

## 2. Arrogance.

Rather than listening to and learning from people, Russell saw himself as an intellectually superior aristocrat. According to Katherine, "He was an aristocrat, who had been taught to think himself superior...."<sup>22</sup> This characteristic would allow him to explain away why so many people disagreed with him. In his view, if they were as smart and educated as him, they'd certainly see it his way.

Along this line, it's interesting to note the difference between how he saw himself and how others saw him. In the first paragraph of his autobiography, he notes that one of the "overwhelmingly strong" passions that governed his life was an "unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind," which he longed to alleviate. But later in his autobiography he relates how he, in spending a day with a woman, decided that he wanted her, no matter how it impacted anyone else.

"...I did not care what might be involved. I wanted to leave Alys [his wife], and to have her leave Philip [her husband]. *What Philip might think or feel was a matter of indifference to me.*" (Italics and brackets mine.)

While I appreciate his candor, this "indifference" shows a troubling lack of compassion for a fellow human being. Neither did he apparently care how this would impact his devoted wife. (She was understandably devastated.) This wasn't a singular event; it would be his pattern throughout life—pursuing new intimacies with no apparent regard for how this would impact those closest to him.

My point? Although he was academically brilliant, his lack of emotional intelligence seemed to make him oblivious to the disconnect between his opening autobiographical comments on being driven to alleviate human suffering, and his later comments about his significant contributions to, and lack of concern for, the suffering of those closest to him. His "me first" attitude in relationships showed arrogance and self-centeredness of the highest order.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. Lack of serious, objective research.**

According to scholars Edwards, Alston and Prior, "For those whose philosophy is shaped not by a respect for facts but by their wishes Russell has always been scathing in his contempt."<sup>24</sup> In a letter, Russell said, "...I care much less about my opinions than about their being true."<sup>25</sup>

But his life and writings speak otherwise.

In his popular writings, he shows a strong tendency to cherry pick facts that support his feelings, rather than doing objective research.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, his essays don't typically exhibit thorough endnotes or fresh research, but rather include wildly speculative and errant data that he finds consistent with his prejudices.<sup>27</sup>

So where do we find his passionate "respect for facts?" Certainly not in his essays. If he were so concerned about truth, why didn't he rigorously engage the strongest arguments of those who held opposing opinions? Why didn't his essays exhibit honest and thorough research? Why did he make huge blanket statements on issues he's not prepared to back up with evidence?

I'd suggest that Russell saw no contradiction between his stated passion for truth and his lack of rigorous research. After all, having a dogmatic personality that saw only black and white, he knew he was right. He knew the relevant facts were on his side, whether he took the time to unearth them or not. So why look seriously at the best opposing arguments or data that might count against his convictions?<sup>28</sup>

Which leads us to our next point.

### **4. Dogmatism on less-than-conclusive points.**

Those with emotional intelligence can put themselves in the intellectual and emotional shoes of those who hold different positions on controversial issues, which often leads them to soften their stance to "it seems to me" or "while other fine thinkers amass data and come to a different position, I hold that...."

But Russell saw black and white. Colin Brown speaks of the "cocksure confidence of his generalizations."<sup>29</sup> Typically this is a fault ascribed to those we label fundamentalists, not academic philosophers. Yet once again, we see him failing to practice what he preached. In his essay on Voltaire, he wrote,

"No opinion should be held with fervour. No one holds with fervour that seven times eight is fifty-six, because it can be known that this is the case. Fervour is only necessary in

commending an opinion which is doubtful or demonstrably false."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps he demonstrates the truth of this passage, thereby condemning himself as he rants about ("holds with fervour") his opinions on issues that have more than one defensible position.

- Paul Johnson speaks of Russell's "mounting anger, accompanied by a lack of concern for the objective facts, the attribution of the vilest motives to those holding different views, and signs of paranoia...."<sup>31</sup>
- In a speech in Birmingham, Russell said, "We used to think Hitler was wicked when he wanted to kill all the Jews. But [United States President] Kennedy and [British Prime Minister] Macmillan not only want to kill all the Jews but all the rest of us too. They're much more wicked than Hitler.... I will not pretend to obey a government which is organizing the massacre of the whole of mankind...They are the wickedest people that ever lived in the history of man."<sup>32</sup>
- "Children should be sent to boarding schools to get them away from mother love."<sup>33</sup>
- "The scientific attitude to life can scarcely be learned from women."<sup>34</sup>

## **5. Unexamined acceptance of authorities who agreed with him.**

Emotionally intelligent scholars understand that the opinions and research of others can be motivated by and impacted by their desires and prejudices. Thus, they think through received opinions independently. But Russell seemed to blindly accept the opinions of social scientists if they agreed with his views.

According to his daughter,

"My father's respect for science, coupled with his rejection of all old-fashioned orthodoxy, led him into absurdities that a greater confidence in his own good sense might have avoided."

Thus, he followed what his daughter described as a "crude behaviorism," which assumed that if we just apply the latest science in raising our children, we can raise a generation of children "almost wholly free from disease, malevolence and stupidity," and free from irrational fears.<sup>35</sup>

To accomplish this, Russell felt that children should be left to cry in their cribs, unless they are in physical distress. We should care for their physical needs "without excessive expressions of sympathy."<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, reasoned Russell, children will learn to manipulate others with their cries and we'll raise tyrants. While it seems harsh, according to Russell and the authorities he followed, ignoring their cries for emotional comfort is the best way to produce a healthy and happy child.

But his daughter, with greater emotional intelligence, begs to differ. Looking back as an adult on her childhood, she's appalled at the reasoning that led to these decisions. If this view of childrearing was based upon someone's experience, "whose experience?" she asks. Certainly

not *her* experience. Who really understands what's going on inside an infant's mind? What if she's truly scared and needs affection? How do we know that more cuddling and comforting in such a situation will produce a tyrant?

But being "mesmerized by the authorities," he held confidently to this "crude behaviorism," seemingly without asking himself such pertinent questions as: "Since this isn't the way your mom and I were raised from infancy, how did we end up so smart, confident and fearless?"<sup>37</sup>

His confidence in his childrearing methods eventually evaporated when he realized that his own children had grown up full of fears and anxieties. He sadly admitted that he "failed as a parent."<sup>38</sup>

## **6. He failed to realize how his own upbringing and emotions influenced his positions.**

People with emotional intelligence can better assess how their own background and emotions are influencing their conclusions. Russell seemed largely oblivious to these influences, imagining himself to be purely reasonable and logical. According to Johnson,

"Russell was not merely ignorant of how most people actually behave; he had a profound lack of self-awareness too.... Even more seriously he did not perceive that he himself was exposed to the forces of unreason and emotion that he deplored in common people."<sup>39</sup>

His parents, both of whom died when he was young, were atheists and relished challenging prevailing views, which Russell apparently internalized. After their death Russell was raised by stern, rigid, joyless, but religious grandparents. Grandmother Russell believed that "plain food, uncomfortable living and unceasing moral exhortation mixed with reproach were good for boys."<sup>40</sup> Surely this impacted his rejection of religion at age 15 and at least partially explains his internalizing his father's "arbitrary taste for radical ideas."<sup>41</sup> I heard one intellectual say that Russell's radical views were better explained by his autobiography than his books and essays.<sup>42</sup> I'd tend to agree.

In reacting against his own austere childhood, Russell eagerly embraced an equally extreme position that children would be fine if we simply gave them enough freedom in their school environment. Let them decide if they want to go to class or not. Let them use any foul language they desire. Why inhibit their expression and interfere with their natural quest for enlightenment?

But implementing this in his supposedly progressive and enlightened school, he failed to provide enough secure boundaries to keep physical and emotional bullying at bay. Surely children need a certain amount of direction and boundaries. And his children needed emotionally available parents with a stable relationship. His daughter Katherine claims that her parents didn't understand these needs. Reacting against his own dysfunctional upbringing, he implemented an equally dysfunctional extreme in raising his own. It's hard to see balance when we're blinded by our own background and emotions.

## Conclusion on Russell

Why would a man who seemed emotionally clueless and so out of touch with real life that he couldn't figure out how to fix his own tea, imagine that he was imminently qualified to fix society? Russell makes a good example of lack of emotional intelligence because the world considered his great strength to be his extremely intelligent, supremely logical mind.

Yet, a closer examination finds that his opinions were often influenced by his upbringing and personal passions, of which he seemed to be largely unaware because of his emotional ignorance. Perhaps the most dangerous influencers among business leaders and academics are those who don't have enough emotional intelligence to realize how their passions are impacting their reasoning.

So whenever you read a supposedly great intellect or great researcher or brilliant businessman, look beyond the argumentation and facts they present. Consider what passions may be influencing their choice of data, methods, and reasoning.

Why do brilliant people believe nonsense? Because they often fail to include emotional intelligence in their reasoning.

### Think!

We just looked at what can happen when we leave emotional intelligence out of our decision making. We may make poor and costly business decisions (Bell Labs developing the picture phone), or promote ideas we think are brilliant, but are strongly influenced by our personalities and desires (Bertrand Russell).

So before I list some practical ways to plug emotional intelligence into our decision making, contrive your own list, based on the above discussions and your personal reflections and experiences. You may come up with some better ideas than I share below!

### Think Different!

So how can we plug emotional intelligence into our arguments and research and life decisions?

**1. When examining a proposal or line of argument, make sure you're giving all intelligent views a chance.**

As we saw with Russell, sometimes lack of empathy and emotional intelligence can lead us to dismiss the views of others before we give them a fighting chance. Make sure to understand the best arguments of the opposition before assuming all who disagree are morons.

## 2. Intentionally reflect upon your emotions.

I tend to doubt and question my emotions, since I've seen emotions lead so many astray. How many people do you know who've fallen in love and allow their emotions to blind them to a person's faults? "She's perfect!" declares the person who's infatuated. But nobody's perfect. Blinded by emotions, we see things the way we want to see them and make illogical decisions.

But *ignoring* emotions can be just as dangerous as being *ruled* by them. For this reason, conceptual thinking guru Edward de Bono recommends that when grappling with a complicated issue, after examining the relevant cold, hard data, we proceed to examine our emotions and feelings about the issue. Both are important.<sup>43</sup>

Had Enron leaders intentionally asked key employees about their *feelings* concerning various company policies, putting aside for the moment their brilliant theories and the facts that supported them, they would have surely uncovered much relevant data.

For example, drawing on relevant emotions, they might have asked their employees,

- If our stockholders understood our accounting methods, whether we can justify them or not as legitimate in the world of accounting, would this enhance or detract from their trust? Might they feel betrayed? If so, how might this impact our business?
- When we encourage Darwinian competition, how does that impact our feelings toward coworkers and leadership? Could this result in a lack of camaraderie and sharing of information, resulting in poor decisions?
- How do you feel when you see cutthroat behavior rewarded monetarily? Does it inspire you to try harder, or demoralize you and make you want to join a competing company instead?

Howard Behar's insights at Starbucks seem to have been perceived emotionally. They weren't the type of insights that Spock would have likely made. While the earlier leadership obsessed about replicating the Italian experience and focused obsessively on the quality of the coffee, Behar asked the deeper question: Why are people coming to Starbucks? He concluded it wasn't all about the coffee. "We're not filling bellies; we're filling souls." That one insight, along with empathizing more with the customers, impacted the decisions at Starbucks and took them to the next level of success.<sup>44</sup>

So don't deprecate emotions. They're often used in the higher levels of critical thinking, such as those described by Bloom's Taxonomy. So embrace them. Get them out in the open. Examine them. Separate them out and include them in your reasoning.

## 3. Don't rule out intuitions and first impressions.

My first response is typically to question my intuitions and first impressions. After all, as we saw in earlier chapters, we're often led astray by them.

Yet, to ignore them would be to set aside important data. Surely we should ask ourselves, "Why is my intuition or first impression of the argument so negative?" Perhaps our brains collected data through the years that resulted in this intuition. The intuition may indeed be wrong, but again it may be right, taking into account data that we've long since forgotten.<sup>45</sup>

Einstein would say that his intuitions impacted his path to formulating his theory of relativity. "A new idea comes suddenly and in a rather intuitive way," Einstein said, "but is nothing but the outcome of earlier intellectual experience."<sup>46</sup> In this case, his intuitions led to his greatest discoveries. But his intuitions could also lead him astray. He once stated, "Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing, but an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing."<sup>47</sup> He would spend the rest of his life resisting the discoveries of quantum physics.

#### **4. Draw on your understanding of people.**

An important part of the success of the Mayo Clinic is that leadership went far beyond coldly analytical thinking. Their mantra "Patients first!" took them beyond the clinical question of how to diagnose an illness. It put them in touch with their patients on multiple levels, so that desk ladies, building designers, janitors, schedulers and systems analysts all looked at their work through the lens of how patients were being impacted. To do this, they had to understand and empathize with people.

Mayo Clinic president Dr. Denis Cortese once expressed this in an essay:

The best physicians and healthcare providers are part engineers and part artists. The engineer sees the problem and applies technology to fix it....

The artist knows when the patient needs a warm smile, reassuring words or a gentle hug. It's the artists who make every patient feel welcome, comfortable, secure, hopeful. The artist sees the anxiety and reassures the new mother that her baby's fever is nothing to worry about. The artist listens to the middle-aged patient unloading his frustration over failed attempts to quit smoking. The artist knows when there's nothing more the engineer can do and helps the patient and family cope at the end of life. What the artist does is why I became a physician."<sup>48</sup>

As a writer, I must empathize with those who don't think like me. Some readers are motivated by things that don't motivate me. Others don't share the same judgments on what is interesting and what is boring. The best communicators understand this and take pains to try to see things as others see them, to get inside their heads.

In writing this book, I've tried to repeatedly ask myself, not just "Is this paragraph relevant to critical and critical thinking?", but additionally,

- Is it relevant to my *readers*?
- Is it *interesting* to my *readers*?

- Does it *motivate* my readers, making them want to know more?

Sometimes I answer these questions by drawing from my own understanding of people; but additionally I run sections by others to see how they respond. Answering these questions correctly makes the difference between an interesting and boring book, between a motivator and a yawner, between lightning and a lightning bug.

Which leads to the next suggestion...

## **5. Beware of creating simplistic profiles of emotionally intelligent people.**

So you want to add someone with more emotional intelligence to your group of advisors. Although psychologists have done a fine job discovering the incredible variety among people's thought processes, emotions and personalities, it's notoriously difficult to assemble a profile of an emotionally intelligent person. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that certain people have strong emotional intelligence in one area, others in another.

While Kenneth Lay, president of Enron, demonstrated lack of emotional intelligence on several levels, he could show great emotional intelligence on other levels. Had you flown in one of Enron's jets with Lay, he'd have likely personally served you snacks at some point during the flight. He could be very likeable and personable. Had you only observed him in this context, you'd have likely assumed that he was an incredibly humble, socially intelligent guy.<sup>49</sup>

Bertrand Russell, for all his ranting, raving and caustic comments, could be remarkably self-effacing and humble in other circumstances. His daughter said he was the perfect grandfather to her children, and he gave substantial financial support to enable her husband to attend seminary in preparation to serve as missionaries to Uganda.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, rather than thinking, "we need both a Spock and a McCoy on our board," think more in terms of people being somewhere on the social intelligence spectrum. People come packaged in fascinatingly unique personalities which defy all attempts to simplify, categorize, and label them.

## **6. Think beyond "success" to "happiness," both regarding ourselves and others.**

This practice often engages our emotional intelligence. For Enron, the bottom line consideration for decision-making seemed to be how much money a deal would generate. But what if the leadership thought a bit deeper and asked, "Why do people want money?"

Typically, people think that more money will make them happier. Yet, psychologists have found that after we've climbed above the poverty line, making an additional \$10,000 or \$100,000 or even \$1 million doesn't do much for our happiness.

So if producing happiness for the most people (employees, customers, etc.) were a priority, how might that influence our decisions? On many levels, Enron failed to implement a satisfying work environment or produce happy people. Enron Executive Cliff Baxter took home his millions, but became so disgusted with what he'd become that he committed suicide.<sup>51</sup>

## **7. Allow your presentations to tap into emotions.**

Great writers and speakers go beyond presenting cold facts and figures. While their ideas are hopefully firmly grounded in sound research, their presentations are typically filled with delightful and memorable stories that engage people on an emotional level.

So ask yourself when you read a great book or watch a great movie or view a great TED Talk, "What not only *informed* me, but *moved* me about that presentation?" Typically, great novelists create characters we care about and share stories we identify with.

If you want to change people's lives, study how to impact them on both an intellectual *and* emotional level.

## **8. Enhance your people skills.**

Whether you consider yourself emotionally intelligent or an emotional idiot, there's much more you can learn. (Remember, your greatest potential for improvement just might be in an area you consider yourself strong.) Read articles on relationships. Study emotions. Read classic works like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The more we sharpen our relational and emotional skills, the better we can use emotional intelligence in our reasoning.

## **9. Ask if it's the right thing to do.**

Many intellectuals shied away from asking this question through much of the 20th century. Influenced by modernism, they denied that objective right and wrong had much meaning in a relativistic age.

Thus, for me it's intellectually invigorating to see intellectuals such as Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandal teaching an extremely popular class and writing a popular book with the title *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* When good people think only in utilitarian terms, their bottom line question is "what's good for the greatest number of people?" The problem with such thinking is that Nazi's could (and did) use it to justify atrocities: "By getting rid of all these undesirables in death camps, we can produce a better society where more people will be happy." Enron leaders could justify cheating and lying by assuring themselves that keeping the stock values high made the employees and stockholders happy.

Sandal, as well as many other contemporary intellectuals, argue that some things are just plain wrong, no matter how many people we imagine will be benefitted from our wrong deeds.<sup>52</sup> Since the book you're reading isn't a book on moral philosophy, rather than argue for objective right and wrong I'll merely say that I think it's helpful to ask, in any decision, "Is it right?" Whether you're basing your morals on your conscience, your religious convictions, reasoning with scientific data, or a combination of these, surely asking the moral questions helps us tap into emotionally intelligent thinking.<sup>53</sup>

## 10. Celebrate plain old, down to earth common sense.

I've often reflected back to an evening meeting of a campus organization while studying at the University of Georgia. A respected academic from another university presented his ideas on a controversial issue and invited questions. Several students raised decent objections that he either evaded or gave unsatisfactory answers to. Finally, one young lady raised her hand and, with a thick southern drawl that gave the impression she'd recently arrived in Athens from a provincial upbringing in the mountains, said, "Sometimes people get so smart that they're just loony...just loony."

At first, I was rather embarrassed for her. But the more I thought about it, I felt she was right. In the intellectual's presentation, his salient points did seem odd, and ill supported by the evidence he presented. Perhaps most of the attendees were thinking her thoughts, but feared to express them. Her practical, seemingly backwoods intelligence cut straight through all the intellectual trappings and, like the little boy in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, expressed a practical gut instinct that may have very well hit the target.

All of which takes me back to this chapter's opening statement by Warren Buffet on what to look for in a business partner:

*"I think you'll probably start looking for the person that you can always depend on; the person whose ego does not get in his way; the person who's perfectly willing to let someone else take the credit for an idea as long as it worked; the person who essentially won't let you down, who thought straight as opposed to brilliantly."*

Intellectual brilliance can often obscure a lack of common sense. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, Buffet blames "geeks with calculators" in part for the recent real estate crisis. Their theories of reducing the impact of bad loans by bundling them in huge packages failed to take into account human nature and the way reducing the standards for loans could be taken advantage of.

No wonder Buffet would prefer hiring someone who "thought straight" rather than "brilliantly." In my opinion, the girl from the country, by thinking "straight," came to a more reasonable conclusion than the professor who reasoned "brilliantly."

"The Smartest Guys in the Room" at Enron thought brilliantly, but not straight. Those with common sense and emotional intelligence could see Enron's fatal flaws early on, had the leadership only been willing to listen to them.

Bertrand Russell's daughter could have told her father about the problems with his "progressive" school, had he only thought to ask. But the self-perceived "brilliance" of Russell's thinking blinded him to the value of those who thought straight.

Which leads me to my final point.

## 11. Get input intentionally from those others wouldn't consider.

Why should I take Bertrand Russell more seriously than anyone else when he speaks on marriage, sex and family? Think back to our discussion where we tried to define "smart." Those who agreed with my data and reasoning in that section might note that Russell was smart "at certain things." He could reflect brilliantly upon the relationship of math with logic, but not so well upon the relationship of open marriages to a stable family or society.

But people are lured into thinking that someone talented at abstract logic is probably talented at anything. He obviously wasn't. When it came to understanding mechanical devices, fixing tea, or fixing schools, he appeared to be much worse than average. He was a mechanical and relational cripple. Why would we expect him to be above average in understanding ethics and fixing the world's problems?

Was he a trained family counselor? No. Had he studied for years the results of surveys and studies of the best families and societies and how they operate? No. Did his four marriages and numerous sexual escapades make him an expert on marriage? Hardly.

Russell would have done well to consult with his children, his wives and girlfriends, his next door neighbors, and particularly those who disagreed with his views. Rather, he tended to despise those "beneath" him or those who disagreed with him. "Everybody is a genius," someone suggested, "but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

To truly test our conclusions, we'd typically do well to listen to a wider range of people, including people who come to the table with a different set of experiences and different ways of thinking.

## Conclusion

I'll close this chapter with an extended quote that's almost certainly extreme. But please understand the data that the author's trying to sum up. Paul Johnson wrote a book titled "Intellectuals," which delves into the lives of select people who've significantly shaped the way we think and make political and personal decisions in modern times, including Rousseau, Shelley, Marx, Tolstoy, Hemingway, Russell, Sartre, and Chomsky.

What Johnson reveals, in his well-researched and well-documented expose, are the petty rivalries, pathetic research, flawed reasoning, selfish and vain motives that often shaped the lives and writings of these highly influential intellectuals.

Granted, perhaps Johnson cherry-picked the influential intellectuals with the most obvious flaws. (I don't see these flagrant flaws in intellectuals such as Frederick Coppleston, or Will and Ariel Durant. But Johnson would probably argue that these were primarily historians as opposed to peddlers of new and influential ways of thinking.)

Yet Johnson's main point is clear. Intellectuals are people. And like most people, their likes and dislikes and passions inform their methods of research, the data they choose, and their conclusions. And granted, it's improper to argue that since these intellectuals and their ideas

were often driven by less-than-honorable motives, that we'd be better off without any intellectuals. After all, Johnson himself was educated at Oxford and is a respected intellectual in his own right. But when so many leaders and ordinary citizens have been influenced by the intellectuals he examines, he believes it pays to reflect more deeply upon them, as we reflected upon Bertrand Russell, to better evaluate the sources of their views and to determine if they're worthy of their following.

With this in mind, listen carefully to Johnson's conclusion after studying the above intellectuals:

"A dozen people picked at random on the street are at least as likely to offer sensible views on moral and political matters as a cross-section of the intelligentsia. But I would go further. One of the principal lessons of our tragic century, which has seen so many millions of innocent lives sacrificed in schemes to improve the lot of humanity, is—beware intellectuals. Not merely should they be kept well away from the levers of power, they should also be objects of particular suspicion when they seek to offer collective advice. Beware committees, conferences and leagues of intellectuals. Distrust public statements issued from their serried ranks. Discount their verdicts on political leaders and important events. For intellectuals, far from being highly individualistic and non-conformist people, follow certain regular patterns of behavior. Taken as a group, they are often ultra-conformist within the circles formed by those whose approval they seek and value. That is what makes them, *en masse*, so dangerous, for it enables them to create climates of opinion and prevailing orthodoxies, which themselves often generate irrational and destructive courses of action. Above all, we must at all times remember what intellectuals habitually forget: that people matter more than concepts and must come first. The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas."<sup>54</sup>

To bring balance to this assessment, I'd suggest that while consulting respected intellectuals is often wise, don't assume they're the final arbiters of truth. And while it may be prudent to have a data-driven logician like Spock on your board, balance him out with a McCoy, Ohura, Scotty, Sulu, and Kirk, all of whom could blend logical and emotional intelligence to improve decision-making.

Why do brilliant people believe nonsense? Because they often fail to allow empathy, emotional intelligence, and common sense to shape their thinking.

## **Flex Your Neurons!**

### **Pursuing the Point of Know Return**

1. Are your intellectual strengths more like Spock, McCoy, or Kirk? In light of your strengths/weaknesses, what kinds of people do you need to balance you out?
2. How do our prior discussions on "strengths" and "multiple intelligences" dovetail with the main lessons of this chapter?
3. How could Russell or Skilling have made better decisions by recognizing and learning from people with intellectual strengths different from their own?
4. How can we take into account intuitions and feelings without allowing them to dominate our decision-making?

## **Making It More Personal Practical Takeaways**

What are one or more ideas provoked by this chapter that you can apply to help you think more critically?

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What are one or more ideas that you can apply to help you think more creatively?

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What else do you want to make sure you don't forget?

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## Recommended Trails For the Incurably Curious and Adventurous

1. To grow in understanding, empathizing with, and working with people, see *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman (New York: Bantam Books, 1995). Then read the classic on relationships, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie (New York: Simon & Schuster, first published in 1936).

2. To understand the profound limitations and prejudices of some of history's most influential intellectuals, read *Intellectuals*, by Paul Johnson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988). To try to understand Bertrand Russell and his mental quirks, read Johnson's chapter on Russell and *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Simon & Schuster, first printed in 1951). Also read Russell's life through the eyes of his daughter: Katherine Tait, *My Father Bertrand Russell* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).



3. Reinforcing Johnson's warning about intellectuals, Berkeley professor Philip Tetlock brings together a wealth of research to argue that the foxes (who know many little things) tend to predict better than the hedgehogs (those who know one big thing), although the latter are considered the experts and everybody wants to hear their opinions. Also significant: Tetlock found those speaking in more tentative terms like "perhaps," and "possibly" are far better predictors than the dogmatic, assured experts. Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

4. As with the last chapter, Debono's Six Thinking Hats helps solve some of the problems encountered in this chapter. If you tend toward a Spock personality type, consciously put on each of Debono's "Hats" to make sure you consider emotions, feelings, and creativity in your decisions.

5. Read this recent article, which references much research in emotional intelligence and applies it to business: Harvey Deutschendorf, "Why Emotionally Intelligent People Are More Successful: Research shows that people with strong emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed than those with high IQs or relevant experience," *Fast Company* (June 22, 2015).