
Psychology and Family Law

Everyone Should Be Required to See *Inside Out*

By Mark Baer, Esq.



behavior.

In the film, it's posed that every person has five main emotions living inside their head: Joy, Disgust, Fear, Anger, and Sadness. Joy is responsible for happiness. Disgust protects us from being poisoned or embarrassed. Fear keeps us out of harm's way. Anger safeguards us from unfairness and injustice. The purpose of Sadness, meanwhile, is not understood or fully appreciated until the very end of the film, when it's function to help people feel empathy for each other is revealed.

In the beginning, the various emotions don't recognize the importance that each of them hold for an individual to survive and thrive. However, as the film progresses, they eventually do come to appreciate one another, and to learn the appropriateness of one over another for any given situation. For example, Joy slowly recognizes the power of empathy, and Sadness' role in that regard.

Empathy is another attribute developed in the film. As psychologists, you understand that empathy involves understanding another person's situation from their perspective. As such, you must be able to place yourself in someone else's shoes, and feel what they are feeling and without judging them. According to emotions expert Brene' Brown, "empathy moves us to a place of courage and compassion."

A capacity for empathy may well be essential for human beings to live in a civilized society. Yet along with other aspects of emotional intelligence, it is in such limited supply these days—when the primacy of the self is more often touted.

According to Daniel Goleman, one's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) comprehends one's capacity for self-awareness, managing emotions, empathy and general social skills. The good news is that emotional intelligence skills can be learned. However, we have to master them by practice, such that they become integrated in our behavior and automatic.

Social and emotional skills such as empathy are absolutely essential to effectively resolve interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, those best suited to work in the field of conflict

resolution should clearly have high EQs.

It has long been known that while lawyers in general tend to be analytical—because the field requires it—they generally score poorly in terms of their EQ levels. This isn't a problem when their job is merely to assist in resolving disputes through legal means, inasmuch as legal disputes are generally resolved through litigation or litigated negotiation. Such processes are by nature adversarial, and thus tend to exacerbate conflict in order to settle the dispute. However, in situations in which interpersonal relationships are directly involved—including but not limited to stand-offs between family members, employers and employees, neighbors, and business partners—those processes which inherently exacerbate conflict become problematic.

It doesn't help that people frequently confuse "conflict resolution or management" with "dispute resolution." Technically, conflicts are emotional, and disputes are fact-based. People with low EQ levels may well be able to resolve disputes, but typically not the underlying (emotional) conflicts.

The film *Inside Out* also beautifully describes how our core *memories* impact our personalities and how our "islands of personalities" make up who we are as people. Our unique backgrounds and life experiences shape our personal values, beliefs, assumptions, and biases. Our personal backgrounds, of course, have very much to do with our parents and how they raised us. Our general life experiences have to do with *everything* we experience in our lifetime, including people we befriend, schools we attend, books we read, etc. This is true for each and every one of us. The over-arching question is how much our lack of self-awareness is skewing our perception, and hence our ability to empathize, and to resolve conflicts with respect for the other's perspective.

On a related note, the following quote from the film holds so true and leads to a great deal of conflict in the world: "Facts and opinion look so similar. They get mixed up all the time." It also mentions "critical thinking," which is how people are able to distinguish fact from opinion. Of course, critical thinking also requires self-awareness, which most people tend to lack.

In my opinion, all those involved in the making of this film deserve the highest critical acclaim. As a conflict resolution specialist, I'm grateful for anything that can move people to appreciating their own subjectivity, the workings of their own minds and those of others, and the value of respect and empathy—even in the midst of disagreements.

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