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# 4 Dealing with Stress in HEALTHY Ways

## 4B LESSON

## Obstacles to Healthy Mind Development



*"We humans have subtle obstacles that cripple our mind's strengths, senses, and abilities similar to how Kryptonite cripples the fictitious character Superman®. We can and need to better understand these obstacles!"*

*Sandra Hughes, EII founder. (1945 – ).*

This lesson explains five major obstacles that make it difficult for us to develop a healthier, more intelligent psychological aptitude and stable well-being. These obstacles distort our reasoning and stress our life experiences. Studying this lesson should help students more easily identify these obstacles in action, and learn to more intelligently deal with the resulting stress.

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## CLARIFYING OUR OBSTACLES

Lesson 3C introduced a list of criteria involved in creating a well-navigated mind and a more civilized world. One of the points on the list of *Self-development Criteria to Nurture* was *Understanding our Obstacles*. These obstacles are listed again below for easy reference, since the subject of this lesson is to further clarify these obstacles. Better understanding should help you recognize and more wisely manage these obstacles in your life experiences.

### 5 Major Obstacles

1. **Deficiencies** - the lack of valuable information, tools, skills, practices, and support that would improve our EQ and well-being.
2. **Complexities** - the complicated, yet important knowledge, skills, and approaches, as well as subtle causes and effects that are not easily recognized or understood.
3. **Internal Susceptibilities** - the natural weaknesses, lures, assumptions, biases, and other dysfunctions that contribute to our distorted reasoning, misjudgments, and misguidance.
4. **External Vulnerabilities** - the external ill influences, such as uneducated opinions and beliefs that others share with us, as well as threats of accidents, disasters, predators, and diseases caused by outside influences that contribute to much of our grief.
5. **Actual Mind Limitations** - the inability for the mind to avoid initial natural feelings, certain frustrations, and other pitfalls. We cannot memorize anywhere near what hi-tech equipment allow us to save and store, which limits our advancement.

*"People seldom see the halting and painful steps by which the most insignificant success is achieved."*

Anne Sullivan, best known for being the instructor and lifelong companion of Helen Keller. (1866 – 1936)

The balance of this lesson provides an in-depth explanation of these five obstacles. You will find that the bulk of what is taught in EII's program falls within the realm of these obstacles as, without clearer understanding, they too easily compromise our thinking, standards of conduct, and ultimately, our health and well-being.

As mentioned in Lesson 4A, with emotions being forefront at the gateway of our thinking process, understanding how our feelings can cause us to react *erroneously* empowers us tremendously. A deeper comprehension of our obstacles enables us to direct our emotions more consciously. Otherwise, nature's ill influences can too freely manipulate our thinking below a conscious radar, causing us, in turn, to ride an emotional roller coaster.

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***Clarifying our obstacles reminds us*** *that by identifying and better understanding what jeopardizes our health and well-being, we can reduce what stifles us and causes unnecessary problems. With clearer emotional insight, we can surely have a better chance of advancing the mind's overall development.*

## REALIZING MAJOR DEFICIENCIES

Deficiencies define impediments to learning particular knowledge that would provide better understanding about our minds and enhance our relationships with the outside world. As mentioned in previous lessons, emotional deficiencies can compare to vitamin and other dietary imbalances that cause physical problems. Once a deficiency is diagnosed, adding proper ingredients to our diet or knowledge to our mind should have a healing effect.

When parents or other mentors have disparities in critical knowledge and skills related to mind development, children are deprived of valuable lessons. Mentors who know very little about what to teach, emotionally, or how to set a good example, behaviorally, leave our youth with deficiencies that cause serious problems in adulthood.

As mentioned in Lesson 1B, we know that when children have had to move from one school to another, they may unknowingly miss out on important knowledge in basic academic subjects. How can anyone realize what education s/he might have missed that really matters, without conducting an extensive investigation, being alerted by others who are knowledgeable, or by experiencing the consequences? Unless a child learns about the emotional elements s/he is lacking that really do matter, s/he remains oblivious to them throughout life.

Our limited psychological education is undoubtedly one of the major reasons for our using less than our mind's true capability. From an extremely unstable standpoint, someone having a very serious deficiency in emotional intelligence defines a psychological condition called *Alexithymia.*

### *A very serious deficiency in emotional intelligence is characterized by:*

1. Difficulty in identifying and communicating feelings
2. Difficulty in distinguishing between feelings and bodily sensations
3. Impaired symbolization, as evidenced by imaginative activity
4. A preference for focusing on external events, rather than inner experiences

*"Anyone who believes that they have common sense has simply forgotten who taught them what they know."*

Alan Quilley, Educator, Writer, Consultant, Mentor, Professional Presenter, and President of Safety Results Ltd.

# Six Major Deficiencies that Stifle Mind Development

When we don't consider the importance of psychological training, we easily miss acknowledging and overcoming the following six major deficiencies, some recognizable from previous lessons:

1. **QUALITY GUIDANCE FROM OTHERS—** When parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, and other men tors lack a high enough level of understanding, skill, or authority themselves to strategically teach our youth what is important to know about the mind and healthy behavior, young people have difficulty learning on their own.
2. **HEALTHY THOUGHT PROCESSING—** If we don't learn enough about healthy thinking practices, we tend to be less concerned about the quality of our thoughts and more prone than we realize to harmful distortions.
3. **INSIGHTFUL BEHAVIORAL KNOWLEDGE—** By not realizing what is learned behavior, rather than natural instinct, we are less concerned about studying important do's and don'ts and other behavioral rules, disciplines, and princples.
4. **INTENTIONAL EMOTIONAL CONTROL—** When we don't know enough about emotions, we are more apt to emotionally react inappropriately. Healthier control results from increased understanding, training, and practice.
5. **DISCIPLINED SELF-SUPERVISION—** If we don't learn enough about how to responsibly care for ourselves, we more easily neglect important priorities and disciplined self-care. Knowledge and concern about quality self-supervision empowers us to better manage ourselves.
6. **RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL-ECO KINSHIP—** By not understanding enough about the merits of healthy behavior toward others and the environment— and detailed ways to apply it, we are less apt to be concerned about social-eco kinship. Developing social-eco skills move us beyond our natural, self-centered, narrow perspective.

***Realizing major deficiencies reminds us*** *that when we can identify and study the criteria within these six major deficiencies, diagnosing dysfunctional behaviors and other emotional problems becomes easier. Lacking such understanding, our minds remain oblivious throughout life to the important knowledge we are missing that really does matter.*

## EXPLORING EQ CRITERIA THAT REALLY MATTERS

Just as athletes who want to ascend to the top of their game rely on highly skilled trainers, we could surely gain much healthier mind development ourselves with well-defined training. Granted, the natural tendency to err is at the core of being human, both functionally and emotionally, but for most of us, so is the quest to improve. As this EQ program suggests, in training we must become:

1. Knowledgeable regarding the competencies that improve mind operation and their value.
2. Aware of the obstacles that interfere with the quality of mind operation.
3. Responsible for monitoring our thoughts, communication, and behavior.
4. Honest and humble in questioning the appropriateness of our thoughts and actions.
5. Willing to memorize healthy self-talk phrases and other pertinent information.
6. Disciplined to practice making appropriate adjustments.

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*"To the casual observer, what we do and say may not appear to be at all heroic. But we– as insiders who are only too well acquainted with our individual limitations can appreciate and applaud a difficult decision or action."—*

Unknown

Without quality direction and healthy regard, we too easily exceed important emotional limits and boundaries. We under-estimate what requires our attention when we don't know how to assess the merits of our own mind. Healthy regard easily fizzles, when we are deficient in understanding and emphasis on effort.

Many of us experience deficiencies in a number of credibility factors that really matter. Most of the factors listed below have already been mentioned in previous lessons. Consider how many you could improve upon with better understanding and effort.

## *Credibility Factors Important to Assess*

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- ❒Guidelines, rules and regulations
- ❒Enlightening facts and statistics
- ❒Helpful approaches
- ❒Reasonable limits and boundaries
- ❒Quality direction and practices
- ❒Creative strategies and techniques
- ❒Health and well-being
- ❒Safety and security precautions
- ❒Congeniality
- ❒Meaningfulness
- ❒Courage
- ❒Respect
- ❒Generosity
- ❒Balance
- ❒Self-control
- ❒Sensibility
- ❒Patience
- ❒Self-awareness
- ❒Sacrifice
- ❒Priorities
- ❒Fairness
- ❒Efficiency
- ❒Honesty
- ❒Kindliness

***Exploring EQ criteria that really matters reminds us*** *that to grow healthier minds, we must not only reduce major deficiencies in understanding, but also maintain a healthy regard for what merits the mind's attention. Psychologically, we are deficient in a number of credibility factors and important assessments that merit our mind's attention and we don't even realize it.*

## UNTANGLING THE MIND'S COMPLEXITIES

Historically, great philosophers and spiritual leaders have stressed the difficulties involved in advancing mind development. Traditional wisdom considered the mind too complex for noticeable improvement. An 18th Century philosopher named Thomas Reid pointed out this complexity quite candidly in an *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, in which he wrote: *"To attend accurately to the operation of our minds and make them objects of thought is no easy matter— even to the contemplative, and to the bulk of humankind is next to impossible."*

However, with the new formal education during the 20th Century, children were challenged to apply their *minds* in a more rigorous and sophisticated manner than ever before. This led to incredible achievements, especially in the areas of science and mathematics. Numerous revolutionary discoveries took us from the horse and buggy era at the start of the 20th Century to what would have been considered by our ancestors as a science-fiction way of living at century's end.

High-tech gurus created amazingly complex computing devices during the 20th Century. Today most of us carry cell phones that enable us to communicate around the globe at any time. Quick and easy access to the Internet, regardless of our location, provides facts, statistics, and other knowledge of virtually any subject imaginable. NASA's close up pictures of distant planets reveal increasingly more about our solar system and beyond.

The complexities that had to be untangled during the 20th Century to accomplish these achievements were mind-boggling. Researchers endured a monumental and tedious process for designing the numerous products that we take for granted today. Can we even begin to imagine what empowered those who laboriously treaded through trial after trial and error after error— and continued to strive, so that they or others could advance such miraculous developments?

*"Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfectionwe can catch excellence."*

Vince Lombardi, an American football player, coach, and executive in the National Football League. (1913 – 1970)

Comparatively, humankind hardly advanced at all, psychologically, during the 20th Century. Instead, dysfunctional behavior had morphed into epidemic proportions by the end of the century. We are our own architects of what scientists consider to be the most intricate entity in the whole universe, the *human mind*. With the ease in which our minds can dysfunction, do we have any doubt that building a wholesome emotional structure requires a well-directed inquiry and comprehensive examination? With so little understanding, it is no wonder that the masses have only been able to master such a small percentage of the mind's actual psychological capability.

***Untangling the mind's complexities reminds us*** *that we are dealing with the most intricate entity in the known universe. Acquiring a healthier, more sophisticated mind involves overcoming a number of complex obstacles that are difficult to understand and even more difficult to master. Yet when successfully championed, we can achieve a major breakthrough. Most assuredly in today's world, developing psychologically brilliant minds is more important than ever before.*

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## EXPLORING THE MIND'S COMPLEX CIRCUITRY

Unfortunately, the most valuable knowledge to understand in any arena of life is rarely easy to discover, and often not so easily translated into training. Not surprisingly, many of the real growth inhibitors that cause us to engage only a small percentage of our mind's true capability, are undoubtedly linked to the most complex and tricky, rather than straight forward to comprehend and easy to enact in human behavior.

Some of the complexities involved in healthy mind development create logistical nightmares for us. This is because many of the deciding factors in emotional situations can be notoriously confusing and tricky to grasp, while the mind has a tendency, in emotional situations, to spontaneously react. Thus, learning to better understand our own minds and form healthier reactions in emotional situations can be extremely challenging. Still, studying such complicated and cumbersome knowledge, skills, and approaches does provide phenomenal insight.

Learning to untangle some of the mind's complexities might compare to the assistance and stages we must endure for mastering mathematics. The psychological stages of mastering our minds range invariably from the elementary do's and don'ts of early childhood, to the comprehensive wisdom that, without training, takes years to develop and master.

No doubt, as complex as the subject may be, understanding how emotions affect us, especially inappropriately, is one of the most important technicalities to grasp about how our minds function. Similar to the arduous efforts involved for developing healthier *bodies*, building healthier minds does not just happen. Can we even imagine what it takes to become an emotional *Einstein,* considering that an emotional genius would need to learn, not only *with* the mind and *about* it, but also how to *govern it extremely well?*

Exploring the mind's intricate circuitry is not an interesting adventure for us all, just as some of us don't enjoy adventuring into complex math or science. Only those who are quite inquisitive choose to work in this field of research. Effort to create a schematic of healthy mind operation is a grueling endeavor. Thus, the vast majority of people prefer to learn from researchers' discoveries, rather than enduring the challenging journey, without a navigator. When we again consider that the mind is the most intricate entity in the universe, having exploratory guidance from those who study it intensely makes an extraordinary difference.

While considering the numerous complexities that inhibit us from understanding the intricate emotional circuitry of the human mind, we should still remain confident about what is possible to learn. If we compare any other accomplishment we have mastered with *adequate* training and study, we can trust that there is a realistic huge growth potential.

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*"You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great."*

Zig Ziglar, American author, salesman, and motivational speaker. (1926 – 2012)

At EII, we don't mean to beat this idea into the ground, but just consider how much higher a percentage capacity you could reach with as much dedicated instruction about your mind, as you had from years of classroom study regarding other basic subjects. You may not be able to gain enough understanding to apply 75 to 100 % of your mind's capacity, but here at EII, we believe that you have the potential for more than doubling your capacity more easily than you may think.

As mentioned, better understanding the mind requires our recognizing what is fitting among confusing and often subtle alternatives. Even after making an emotional decision, we sometimes never know if it was the best choice.



Research discoveries are rich in potential, yet such enlightenment is also stifled by skepticism. Take the theory of emotional intelligence, itself, for instance. Over the years since EI was introduced, it has been met with critical arguments, yet continues to grow in acceptance.

Historically, skepticism has shelved many research discoveries for years, because established opinions fed the rejection of worthy evidence. An interesting example of unbelievable rejection toward research findings occurred during the 19th Century when Ignas P. Semmelweis, MD discovered how to eliminate *puerperal fever* after doctors had taken steps to disinfect their hands by washing them between surgeries. Diseases such as typhoid and malaria were associated with the contact of water and some doctors were offended at even the suggestion that they should wash their hands.

Despite various statistics showing that hand washing reduced mortality to below 1%, Semmelweis's discovery did not earn widespread acceptance until years after his death in 1865. This was a simple change in practice, but the convincing *reasons* to do so were too complex to prove during that era.

No matter what a person's educational background, anyone can have trouble validating what works best, due to subtle complexities that drive our beliefs and behavior. Mixed messages create old-school restrictions, distorted opinions, too casual liberties, and other drivers in society that come across as confusing. Too often the evidence that would substantiate reality is discounted or not considered. Even our own observations and discoveries may conflict with the established opinions, and be prone to rejection by society. Unfortunately, only after much time and an abundance of evidence do we consider some existing widespread practices out of date.

***Exploring the mind's complex circuitry reminds us*** *that better understanding should award us at least double our present capacity. Such an increase may be closer to grasping than we think. One of the most important technicalities to grasp about how our minds function is understanding how emotions affect us, especially inappropriately. We must more clearly recognize mixed messages, propaganda, distorted and uneducated opinions, old-school restrictions, and other ways we validate our beliefs, yet allow us to reject evidence and new ideas.*

## EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITIES OF PRACTICE

For centuries, people have marveled at the unusual mental abilities of scientific geniuses and other talented prodigies; those who can solve complex problems, learn without studying or practicing, play musical instruments by ear, or remember unbelievable instances in their lives. Unfortunately, the majority of us remain clueless as to how these minds became so detailed and wondrous without study or dedicated practice.

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*"Nature has placed mankind under the government of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure... they govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think."*

Jeremy Bentham, English philosopher and social reformer, regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism. (1748 – 1832)

Nonetheless, enhancing psychological development is a sophisticated coordination that requires practice, even for those with marvelous minds. Despite the fact that they can do the unbelievable, talented prodigies still struggle with emotions they do not comprehend, just like the rest of us, and require training, study, and practice.

Anything we practice can be performed with different degrees of attention and effort, a distinction that is complex to diagnose, from casual mindless repetition to deliberate, systematic, and scientifically well-founded techniques. *Deliberate* practice is a complex process of hypothesis testing, relentlessly seeking solutions to clearly defined problems. Deliberate practice requires particular direction, as well as patience and fortitude to endure the rather arduous and concentrated micro-repetitions over a long period-of-time.

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We do not question the practice necessary for such professions as athletes, musicians, or public speakers to reduce their chance of error in front of an audience, let alone the efforts required to keep mistakes to a minimum in most any other profession. But do we consider the dedicated practice necessary to improve mind function, itself? Failure is no doubt frustrating in any endeavor. Yet enduring failure and continuing to practice for improvement are prerequisite to most of our successes. Michael Jordan, infamous American professional basketball player once said:

> *"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."*

The intricacies of deliberate practice involve monitoring our performance and continually evaluating our level of attention regarding inappropriate habits and ways to improve. Some research suggests that at least 10,000 hours of deliberate practice is required to achieve an expert level of performance in any given domain. If we were to have the discipline for *practicing to attain psychological growth* for eight hours each day, attaining 10,000 hours would take us a little over three years.

Our efforts to improve mind development include many practice exercises that can be performed while going about our regular daily tasks. Other improvements require particular activities, such as those in EII's program. As you continue to seek improving how you navigate your mind, realize that a number of subtle, yet deliberate practices are vital disciplines to endure.

***Exploring the complexities of practice reminds us*** *that sometimes when we are not improving with practice, we need to consider evaluating the degree of attention and effort we have been applying. Are we exercising deliberate practice or mindless repetition? If deliberate practice is not helping us improve, are we going through the complex process of defining a new strategy?*

## CLARIFYING INTERNAL SUSCEPTIBILITIES

As you've been studying our program to improve your EQ, previous lessons and supplements provided examples of inappropriate actions we humans are *susceptible* to accepting— nature's persuasive ideas that eventually cause us harm. Susceptibilities are included in this lesson because they are such a debilitating obstacle to advancing mind development.

A number of healthy mind functions that are easily understood are problematic when we attempt to convince the mind to willingly accept or practice. A common example of this is how easy it is to understand what is healthy to eat, yet how difficult it is to follow such a disciplined diet.

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*"Stand up to your obstacles and do something about them. You will find that they haven't half the strength you think they have."*

Norman Vincent Peale, minister and author of "The Power of Positive Thinking" and a progenitor of "positive thinking". (1898 – 1993)

Why are we susceptible to accepting persuasive choices that are unhealthy and sometimes even toxic, and yet so hesitant to yield to healthy choices? Could it be that indifference or inertia have set in, allowing us to avoid the strain or pain associated with healthy choices, or is it that we don't have a repertoire of bold self-talk phrases to guide us more sensibly?

Emotionally, we all have the creative license to build and apply our own mind as we see fit. As mentioned earlier, we are our own *architects*. Yet without sensible psychological direction early on in our childhood, persuasive factors can influence the mind and allow us to create ingrained habits that distort the very composition of the mind even before adulthood.




Such distortions compare to people's botched attempts at building sophisticated structures without consulting an architect or an engineer. Similarly, without sensible guidance, we may too easily consider haphazard construction ideas as we build our minds, and not realize what rules and guidelines are required for developing healthy, mature adult minds.

Thus, even with the multitude of resources that can help us reduce our deficiencies to mind development, as well as research discoveries that eliminate some of the complexities, we still have to overcome a strong disinterest in doing what it takes to develop a more intelligent psychological aptitude. The biggest problem is that to improve the mind, psychologically, we have to avoid many persuasive comforts. This makes susceptibilities, by far, the most difficult obstacle to overcome for advancing healthier mind development.

How often do you catch and stop yourself in the midst of natural persuasions? With habitual acceptance of a primitive desire for comfort, the mind more easily surrenders to natural urges, self-centered interests, and other ill-based sensations. Unfortunately, such persuasions warp emotional growth and strain relationships.

***Clarifying internal susceptibilities reminds us*** *that the mind's most primitive emotional peculiarity can easily misguide our thinking. We must not only be aware of persuasive impulses and other inappropriate distortions, we must continuously battle them with vigilance. If we just assume that our minds are working properly, we reduce our chances of improving mind function significantly. Avoiding our susceptibilities provides numerous life-changing benefits.*

## MANAGING OUR REACTIONS TO SUSCEPTIBILITIES

Undoubtedly, this extraordinary computing wonder in our heads is worthy of much attention, and to apply well, requires careful management. To think and behave wisely, especially when it is uncomfortable, requires extraordinary self-governing. A touch of genius to our emotional intelligence emerges each time we recognize and accept the discipline needed to avoid natures' persuasive impulses. Lacking keen attention and a healthy determination to apply the mind wisely, we remain susceptible to sabotaging quality performance.

Many requirements for a civilized world simulate subtle imperatives for a healthy mind. A vivid parallel is that for a civilized world, laws and guidelines are necessary to prevent disorder and chaos. So too for the mind, adhering to well-defined self-governing rules and guidelines is necessary for preventing distortions that cause emotional heartache and chaos in our lives.

No doubt, a high level of emotional intelligence is required to parent ourselves well, while challenged by the deceptive manipulation of our primitive desires. Providing an impressive command over our emotions in the midst of a challenging battle with our primitive desires requires incredible determination and skill.

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*Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.*
*The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.*

Thomas A. Edison, American inventor and businessman who developed many devices that greatly influenced life around the world, including the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and the electric light bulb. (1847 – 1931)

As mentioned earlier, the natural tendency to err is at the core of being human. Emotionally however, giving in to our susceptibilities amounts to more than just the mere *oops* factor. If we are to earnestly manage our emotions while natural inclinations are stimulating aggressive feelings, we must react more like an adult overseeing a small anxious child in a candy store.

To advance humankind, psychologically, people around the world will need to come to grips with the mind's susceptibilities and better understand the mind's slippery slopes. We just do not have the luxury of a built-in *automatic impulse controller* that would search for and force us to accept the wisest reasoning possible. Disturbingly, too many of us are more powerless to fight emotional enticements than we are at resisting to scratch a physical itch from poison ivy.

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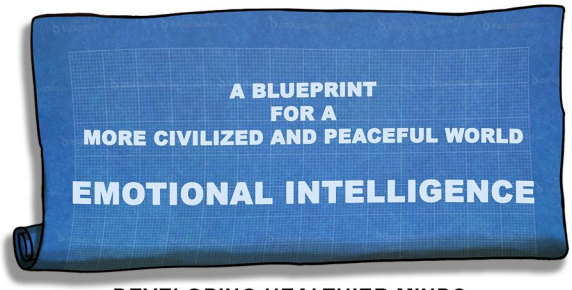
Earlier lessons mention a comparison of kryptonite's effect on Superman®, to an emotional kryptonite that reduces our strength, senses, and ability to follow better judgment. Unfortunately, at some point our susceptibilities leave us feeling awkward, embarrassed, and disappointed, thus emotionally crippled, from this human kind of emotional kryptonite!

While dealing with such *intense* sensations as taste buds, hormones, and anger, our tendency to make mistakes may be so strong that we need comparable to a straight-jacket to restrain ourselves. Strong deceptive feelings can overpower us— with kryptonite crippling results— an inability to even consider wiser efforts, healthier priorities, or a simple direction change.

Many human disorders and addictions are created because of a lack of understanding and caution when encountering alluring enticements and other temptations. Yet even after these forces have caused exceptional grief, people can continue to cave in to them— mainly because the mind has become so habitually accustomed to allowing their influence. Perhaps temptations cast somewhat of a spell over us that causes an erosion of our senses, making it impossible for us to even consider outsmarting these powerful ill feelings.




**DEVELOPING HEALTHIER MINDS REQUIRES a WELL DESIGNED BLUEPRINT**

Comparably, our financial security depends on our professionalism at work, and caution about how we spend our hard-earned income. If we are to become more quality oriented, psychologically, we must consider our emotional security. Similar to how easily we may spend money on what we like and neglect other financial needs, we can just as easily spend personal time and energy pursuing unproductive desires while avoiding more emotionally intelligent challenges.

Although crucial to our emotional well-being, the competencies that would reduce our susceptibilities are not normally self-evident or natural inclinations. The only way to strengthen these competencies is by pressuring ourselves to regulate our thoughts and behavior more wisely. Even though such regulation is definitely wise, this option, no doubt, challenges our patience.

Nonetheless, we must remember that patience is one of the most significant competencies for reducing susceptibilities and has been well understood as a virtue for thousands of years. Experiencing alluring feelings may never be totally avoided, but our reactions to them can be reprogrammed and nullified by increasing our patience.

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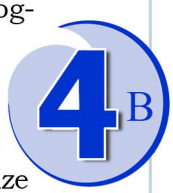
*"It is always the start that requires the greatest effort."*

James Cash, American businessman best known for starting J.C. Penney's. (1875 – 1971)

Without strong emotional fortitude, we too easily lose important emotional battles with these alluring forces. By being disciplined and responsible, we learn to accept what is helpful for reaching a healthier goal, instead of giving in to our unhealthy preferences. When we don't overcome these kinds of obstacles, no doubt we aren't recognizing the need for guarding ourselves against alluring forces or we haven't built enough willpower to avoid them.

Willpower can be strengthened but is often susceptible to failure due to a downright lack of caring, a symptom of lethargy. Emotional stability is a balancing process, quite similar to ecological stability. Both are improved by our own sense of urgency toward the causes and concerns involved. Only by accessing the power we have to reason clearly are we able to take the necessary precautions for improving our reactions to these natural human tendencies.




Through this and previous lessons, you have learned valuable ways to reduce your susceptibility toward surrendering to primitive desires. In Lesson 4C, you will learn how to scrutinize your thinking more closely and further reduce your susceptibilities.

***Managing our reactions to susceptibilities reminds us*** *that leveraging our emotions may be as important to our EI as general knowledge is to our IQ. Yet, commanding our emotions can sometimes be tricky and challenging, in light of nature's influence on the mind, which is often cunning and deceptively manipulating. Wisdom is overpowered when we follow alluring feelings— with a kryptonite crippling result, numbing our future interest in better navigating the mind.*

## CLARIFYING OUR EXTERNAL VULNERABILITIES

We live in a world of external threats and endangerments, from accidents and diseases, to financial problems and criminal behavior. You might ask, though, why these problems would be considered obstacles to healthier mind development and emotional wellness? Quite frankly, guarding against such external *vulnerabilities* can prevent needless grief and emotional suffering, as well as our own demise. Often times emotional foresight requires precautionary measures for reducing the chances of frustration and other more serious problems.

Many hazards and unhealthy conditions may easily be remedied or even prevented. Other endangerments require particular understanding, along with vigilant oversight. The vastness of our vulnerabilities is clearly evident when we consider the many professional requirements of the United States Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA). The OSHA Handbook lists over 1600 pages of professional vulnerabilities. It includes both injuries and illnesses, while highlighting the most significant hazards.

Since OSHA's creation in 1970, employers have been legally responsible for providing safe and healthful working conditions; most businesses have had to comply with industry-specific requirements, which include inspections and injury reports. Employers are also encouraged to search out workplace hazards and eliminate them, or be subject to penalties. Sadly, the latest statistics indicate that almost five million workers are injured each year in the USA alone.

From a personal standpoint, a number of other organizations in the USA offer insight, health, and safety information, including the following:

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|---|---|
| National Safety Council | Department of Justice |
| Consumer Protection Agency | Homeland Security |
| Center of Disease Control and Prevention | Federal Trade Commission |

*"The more sophisticated we get, the more advanced our vehicles and buildings become, the more vulnerable we are."*

Stephen Ambrose, American historian and biographer, author of many best selling volumes of American popular history. (1936 – 2002)

The closest example of another government agency that compares to OSCHA, but on a personal level, is the National Safety Council (NSC). Unfortunately, especially for children, only minimal specific *requirements* exist for eliminating family hazards. Thus, NSC does not list anything close to OSCHA's 1600+ page list of professional vulnerabilities, even though a more detailed list would be extremely helpful.

Encouragingly, however, each year in June, thousands of organizations across the country share safety concerns in observance of *National Safety Month*. The month event is dedicated to raising awareness of what it takes to stay safe, focusing on reducing the leading causes of injury and death at work, on the road, and in our homes and communities. The National Safety Council's web-site shares a number of helpful safety tips throughout the year, providing even more during June's National Safety Month.



One way to distinguish *some* of the most significant health vulnerabilities is by looking at the most common accidents seen in emergency rooms. The statistics reveal that our most common daily activities can pose the biggest threats to our safety. Sometimes safety is improved by just knowing when to be careful, or by having the right tool at hand, such as a flashlight or goggles. Other times, we can reduce our vulnerabilities by being better prepared for possible emergencies. Below is a list of the ten most common reasons for emergency room visits according to statistics reviewed by the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds:

1. Headaches
2. Foreign objects in the body
3. Skin infections
4. Back pain
5. Cuts/contusions
6. Upper respiratory infection
7. Sprain/broken bones
8. Toothaches
9. Abdominal pains
10. Chest pains

*Lack of emergency preparedness* ranks among the top seven unintentional injury related deaths that occur in homes and communities, according to the US National Safety Council's Injury Facts. Please see their website for further information: www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/odds-of-dying/unintentional. Below are the six top causes mentioned for ages 1-44:

1. Poisoning
2. Motor vehicle accidents
3. Falls
4. Choking and suffocation
5. Drowning
6. Fire related burns

Aside from recognizing the most predominant emergency room injuries and unintentional deaths, we need to be aware of the countless other vulnerabilities, from environmental hazards and critical maintenance issues, to current recalls and criminal scams. See government websites that list the latest recalls and scams.

***Clarifying our external vulnerabilities*** *reminds us of the massive dangers in life. However, with emotional foresight, we can take precautionary measures to reduce problems and frustration. Many hazards and unhealthy conditions may easily be prevented by just knowing when to be careful; other endangerments require more focused and vigilant attention.*

## DEALING WITH OUR EXTERNAL VULNERABILITIES

Safety often plays a silent role in our lives. To prevent needless grief, we must be our own safety advocates. Only through our own precautions can we protect ourselves, and sometimes others from unnecessary injuries, delayed medical attention, and deaths. Yet how easily can we forget or ignore important safety measures as we rush about our daily affairs?

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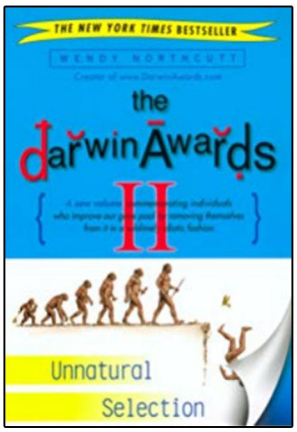
*"When man meets an obstacle he can't destroy, he destroys himself."*

Ryszard Kapuscinski, Polish reporter, writer, photographer, widely considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature. (1932 – 2007)




Cautiousness is a selective aspect of the thinking process. We learn to be cautious about certain concerns, but miss others. Our lack of safety knowledge or neglect of certain precautions sometimes cause us to learn the hard way— by the pain we feel from accidents or mistakes. We must remember that neglecting safety concerns is a conflict of interest with our own well-being that puts us in harm's way. Safety statistics, as mentioned earlier, often provide evidence of a deficiency in knowledge about certain hazards. The *Darwin Award* book collection chronicles story after story of people who died from a serious lack of understanding about safety.

4B

Sadly, medical precautions are often determined by the quality of our health insurance, rather than our ability to watch for symptoms that require medical attention. Even though high-tech, sophisticated tests are available to detect serious medical problems early on, such technology is not easily accessible unless we have adequate insurance.

***Dealing with our external vulnerabilities reminds us*** *that we must advocate for our own safety. Life requires us to recognize when to choose between experiencing what we are doing through the lens of serious precaution or opting for less demanding considerations. Cautiousness is a very selective aspect of the thinking process, so we can, unfortunately, easily avoid it. Our lack of safety knowledge or concern may cause us to learn the hard way— i.e. experiencing the pain we feel from accidents or mistakes.*

## ACCEPTING MIND LIMITATIONS

Science fiction movies sometimes suggest that the human mind has the power to function at a far superior level than we learned to apply. As with the difference between fiction and reality, there are certain mind accomplishments that will never be possible; and just as there are many inexplicable wonders of the world, there are also numerous wonders of the mind and life that we may never understand.

We may not be able to avoid initial natural feelings, certain frustrations, or other pitfalls in life, but we can reduce inappropriate reactions. We cannot memorize anywhere near what hi-tech equipment allows us to save, store, and retrieve, but we may use these tools to track and store information that would help us monitor our reactions, as well as organize and quantify our lives.

We all wish that we could avoid the pitfalls of life or rewind time to change certain aspects of our past. However, Murphy's law suggests that there is no way to consciously avoid some of the things that go wrong in life. With continued improvements to hi-tech equipment and clearer understanding of *self-imposed* limitations, we should be able to clearly recognize what can be improved in the future and what cannot.

***Accepting mind limitations reminds us*** *that some of life's pitfalls cannot be avoided, such as initial natural feelings or certain frustrations, but we can reduce inappropriate reactions significantly. Having a better understanding of what is possible and impossible for our minds to do helps us in better shaping the future of humanity.*

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*"Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."*

Michael Jordan, an American basketball player who led the Chicago Bulls to six NBA championships and won the most valuable player award five times. (1963 – )

# CONCLUSION: Clearing the Path to Healthier Development

No one can deny that human behavior needs to be improved and that we can learn to do better. For future generations to attain a higher level of development, psychologically, such a learning objective must be clarified and our obstacles understood.

Over the past few thousand years, the human brain has not changed much at all, physiologically. Moreover, there is no magical equation for achieving an emotionally well-balanced mind. However, we are able to improve our chances of gaining a clearer path to healthier mind development by understanding the five obstacles covered in this lesson.



Dysfunctional behavior is a worldwide epidemic that affects individuals, no matter whether wealthy or poor, a minister, a business executive, or a politician. The broad scope of dysfunction crosses all boundaries.

A number of complex factors contribute to improving mind development. The mind's instability and the state of our planet's ecological environment are both wake up calls for the future. We must *take heed* to concern ourselves with the vital signs that distinguish problems and the need for improvement. Yet improving the condition of both our minds and the environment is a complex undertaking, while we more easily accept denial or remaining oblivious.

Lacking particular pieces of information or poorly understanding the facts can cause excessive struggles— without our realizing the cause. We only know that something is awry by our difficulties and their consequences. Not unlike children who must move from school to school, we may not consider that which really matters, unless someone else brings it to our attention in a clear manner. To fill the gap, we might seek out an educational program, wonder enough to research self-development materials, or search the Internet. We may have an enlightening experience that helps us discover much more than we thought we could learn about our mind.

With the human mind being such a complex entity and so little being understood by the masses, the psychological evolution remains a slow churning process. We should be encouraged, however, by the many organizations that advocate for including EQ training in school curricula, and some semblance of social/emotional learning (SEL) that can already be found in thousands of schools worldwide.




*"We must respect the past and mistrust the present, if we wish to provide for the safety of the future."*

Joseph Joubert, French moralist and essayist who wrote numerous thoughts about the nature of human existence that were published posthumously. (1754 – 1824)

# NOTES



*"I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do."*

Leonardo da Vinci, an Italian painter, architect, inventor, and student of all things scientific. His natural genius crossed so many disciplines that he epitomized the term "Renaissance man." (1452 – 1519)