



Interview with Barbara A. Kerr, PhD, author of
Creating an Emotionally Intelligent World

Q: What is Emotional Intelligence?

A: Let me offer two answers to this seemingly simple question—one for your mind and one that I hope you will feel in your whole self.

First, of all the formal definitions that have been developed and used by those who study and measure Emotional Intelligence, I prefer to use a “committee definition,” which is the result of a survey of experts by *EQ Today*:

“There is an intelligence based on emotion, and people who have this capacity are less depressed, healthier, more employable, stronger leaders, better decision-makers, and have better relationships.”

That is, I believe, a “good enough” definition for a concept that is currently being intensively studied and is increasingly being recognized as important to the success of individuals, teams, and entire organizations.

In my workshops, however, I tell people that I want them to leave the workshop with more than a definition of words. Instead, they gain a mental picture and visceral feel for the meaning and implications of Emotional Intelligence. The picture I suggest is that of an inner GPS. I ask them to imagine using a GPS as it might be used by a pilot, or a hiker, or an automobile driver. The GPS assists you in determining where you are, and it also helps you plot a route toward the goal of your journey. When the external environment presents obstacles—a washed out bridge or a closed road for example—or when your internal processes take you off the route, such as making a wrong turn or going too far in one direction, the GPS can help you keep your equanimity and balance to reconfigure your route so that you can be successful in achieving your goal.

Emotional Intelligence can help you cope with both your own internal emotions and the external challenges that arise in the real world of making decisions and interacting with other people.

Q: Why is the topic of Emotional Intelligence important for today's organizations?

A: We can no longer afford to pretend that emotions are not part of the workplace. In fact, ignoring emotions can result in costly lawsuits, lack of productivity, contentious bargaining, and loss of good employees. But the good news is that we can not only measure emotional intelligence but also learn ways to enhance it. We can improve our skills in managing our emotions, we can learn effective ways to cope with that difficult employee or that insensitive boss, and we can build resilience despite the inevitable stresses and changes in our lives.

Ever since Daniel Goleman's first book on emotional intelligence was published in 1995, an ever multiplying number of studies, articles, and books have contributed to our understanding of Emotional Intelligence. Individuals, teams, and organizations that are emotionally intelligent are able to maintain balance amidst inevitable change and to greatly increase their productivity and success.

Q: What is the benefit of developing an emotionally intelligent workforce?

A: For a long time, people behaved as if emotions had no place in the workplace. But emotions are powerful, and they are an inherent part of our actions and interactions in the workplace—the decisions we make, the influence we have in leading a team, the impact we have on customers, the ways in which we interact with those we work with, and the resilience we demonstrate during times of change or crisis.

Being aware of our own emotions and being able to manage them is the foundational skill of Emotional Intelligence. Good self-awareness can help build an awareness of and empathy for others, skills that are crucial in successful interactions—with a boss, with peers, with people who may report to you, and with customers and clients. And that ability to interact successfully with others helps build better and more productive teams, more satisfying relationships within and outside the organization, and greater resilience to help weather the inevitable changes and even crises that occur in the workplace environment.

Q: Why did you choose a game format for Creating an Emotionally Intelligent World?

A: As excited as I was about presenting the concepts of Emotional Intelligence to executive, leadership, and management teams, it didn't take me long to understand that a detailed PowerPoint presentation was not an effective means for conveying either the concepts or my own enthusiasm for the possibilities of enhancing Emotional Intelligence. *Creating An Emotionally Intelligent World* was conceived, first as a board game and then as an

interactive, computerized game, to provide an active, experiential learning activity for participants. The main objective has always been to help participants understand the concepts of Emotional Intelligence and the significance of Emotional Intelligence to their success in the workplace as individuals, as team members, and as members of a larger organization.

Q: What will the participants learn and take away from the game experience?

A: The game is fast-paced, thought-provoking, and fun for teams of participants. More significantly, participants become more aware of the role that emotions play in everyday experience, in both the personal and professional aspects of their lives. In playing the game, they become more aware of their own emotions, and more adept at reading emotional cues in others. They experience the importance of Emotional Intelligence for making wise decisions, for influencing others, for building satisfying and productive relationships and teams, and for maintaining balance and resilience despite the stresses of the workplace—and stresses from outside work that may affect performance. Participants understand the possibility of creating an emotionally intelligent world for themselves, a world in which they can build satisfying relationships and support networks, build personal resilience and leadership competencies, and enjoy the journey toward the successful achievement of their goals.

About the Author

Dr. Barbara A. Kerr



Dr. Kerr conceived and designed *Creating an Emotionally Intelligent World*, a computer-based training game for organizational development. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Temple University and is an executive coach who has successfully run her own consulting business for more than twelve years. Dr. Kerr is certified in administering and interpreting the EQ-i, the most scientifically validated assessment of emotional intelligence. Having completed post-graduate training with the College of Executive Coaching, she is a certified Master Personal and Executive Coach. She is the author of several books, including “Read All Your Life” and co-author of “You Can Choose Your Own Life,” a decision making program for middle-school youngsters.