Grounding Professional Coaching Practice
with Positive Assessments of Emotional Intelligence

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The purpose of this article is to introduce a positive assessment that grounds our professional coaching philosophy and practice; an integrated process that has emerged over the last 40 years.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) has historically operated from a competency-based model that we were drawn to when we wrote the first edition of our book on EI-centric coaching, *Professional Coaching: A Transformative and Research Based Model* (Nelson et al., 2013). Over the last 24 months the ICF has been involved in qualitative research with experienced coaches to validate and where necessary, revise their core competency model. Any references in this paper to core competencies reflect the new competency model that will go into effect January 2021 (International Coach Federation, 2019).

Positive Assessment – Skills for Career And Life Effectiveness®

The genesis of this transformative theory of coaching was with the research and development team of two young psychologists. In 1977, Darwin Nelson and Gary Low began to study factors differentiating successful and healthy people from those not so healthy and successful. Initial findings were skills that could be learned, developed, and applied in life and career. Not so much fixed factors such as traits, types, or temperaments. They created, researched, and published their first positive assessment to measure personal, emotional, relational, and life (PERL) skills as a first step to engage individuals and groups in meaningful personal learning and change. We have since created a family of valid and reliable assessment products based on their original research. The instrument that coaches in general find most useful is our online Skills for Career And Life Effectiveness® (SCALE®). The dimensions, skills, and potential problem areas measured by SCALE® are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

SCALE® Dimensions, Skills, and Potential Problem Measures

Dimension	Related Skill(s)
Intrapersonal	Self-Esteem
Interpersonal	Assertive Communication, Comfort, Empathy
Career-Life Effectiveness	Drive Strength, Decision Making, Time Management, Influence, Commitment Ethic
Personal Wellness	Stress Management, Physical Wellness
Problematic Indicators	Aggression, Deference, Change Orientation

Note: The problematic measures of Aggression, Deference, and Change Orientation are reframed as Anger Control/Management, Anxiety Control/Management, and Positive Change, respectively, when working with clients. Adapted and used with permission from Emotional Intelligence Learning Systems (2020).

Instrument Description and Operation[1]

The online SCALE® consists of 98 three-point Likert scale items that measure 14 skills-based emotional intelligence (EI) scales using 7 items per scale. The three available responses are Least Like Me = 0,

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[1] The information presented here on the SCALE's psychometric performance is summarized from R. Hammett's "Validating the Skills for Career And Life Effectiveness" (in press) for the next volume of *International Journal for Transformative Emotional Intelligence*. Adapted with author's permission.

Sometimes Like Me = 1, and Most Like Me = 2. The 14 scales consist of 11 that are skills and three that are potential problem areas which are reframed as skills for development. The SCALE® skills and potential problem areas, their theoretical minimum and maximum scores, and their observed descriptive statistics (N = 98) are presented in Table 2. All seven in the Stress Management competency and one item in Physical Wellness are negatively worded and those items are reverse scored by the computer.

Table 2

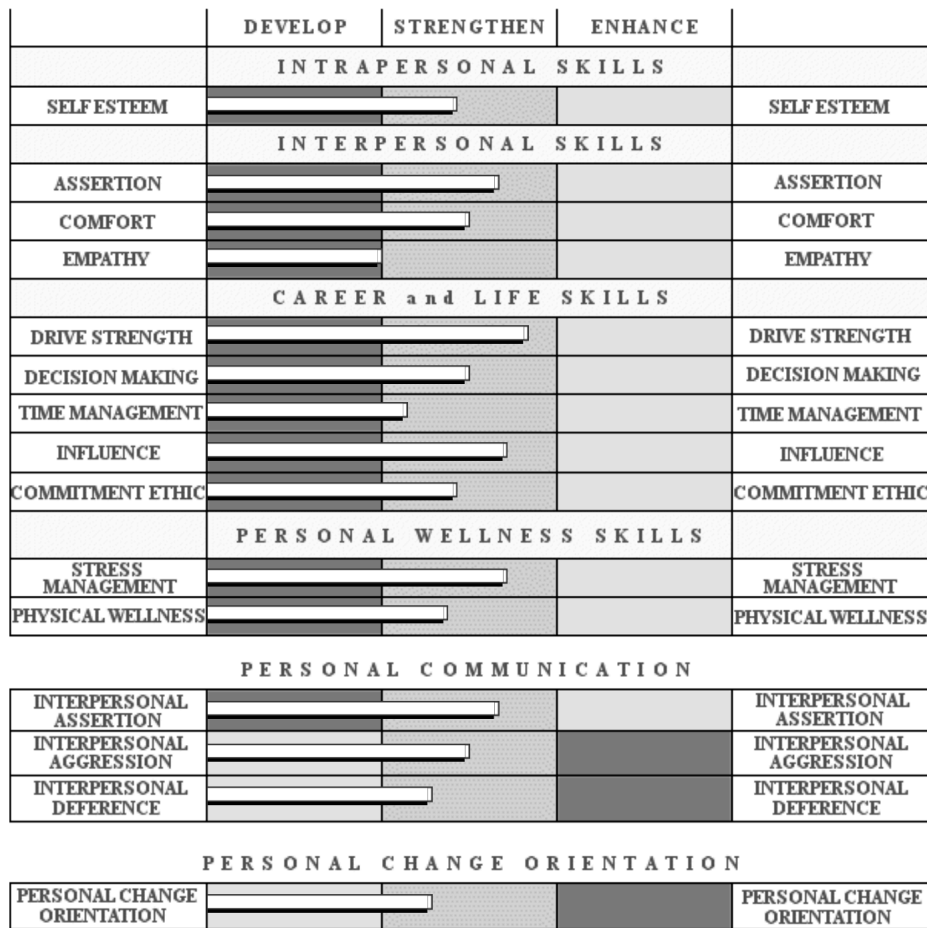*The SCALE® Measures, Theoretical Scores, and Actual Score Statistics*

Measure	Theoretical Min	Theoretical Max	Actual Min	Actual Max	Mean	SD
Self-Esteem	0	14	5	14	12.13	2.08
Assertion	0	14	3	14	11.17	2.60
Comfort	0	14	4	14	12.55	2.00
Empathy	0	14	0	14	12.48	2.24
Drive Strength	0	14	8	14	12.32	1.65
Decision Making	0	14	5	14	12.07	2.19
Time Management	0	14	2	14	11.13	3.06
Influence	0	14	4	14	10.14	2.63
Commitment Ethic	0	14	6	14	12.80	1.44
Stress Management	0	14	1	14	9.94	3.24
Physical Wellness	0	14	3	14	10.21	3.36
Aggression*	0	14	0	13	2.31	3.03
Deference*	0	14	0	13	3.13	3.14
Change Orientation*	0	14	0	14	3.86	3.05

Notes: N = 98 for last four columns. *SD* = standard deviation. * = problematic indicators.

Our 40+ years of experience and research with 3-choice assessment models has affirmed our initial decision to use them. From a practical perspective, when someone responds with either extreme, those responses are significant and meaningful. As described in this article, the 3-point response model performs well psychometrically as well. Each of the 98 items are behaviorally anchored statements that requires the respondent to estimate their location on the Likert scale (i.e., estimate their skill level) based on the particular skill measured by the item. For example, one of the items that measures Empathy reads, "I seem to be able to accurately feel what another person feels". During the survey process, the items are randomly presented one at a time on the computer screen and the font color of every other item alternates between green and blue. The instrument takes 15-20 minutes to complete using the web-based computer delivery platform (www.doscale.com). After responding to the last item, the user can return to their SCALE® dashboard and select their profile results to view. The SCALE® profile is a horizontal bar chart that shows the user's summated scores for each area within three vertical bands (see Figure 1). While logged in on the website, the user can review the research-derived skill definitions provided below their profile. The skill definitions contain embedded .pdf links that can be selected to reveal additional skill interaction and development information for each skill. The two outer bands' colors on the profile are reversed for the problematic indicators. Also notice in Figure 1 that the Assertion skill is shown twice, once under the interpersonal communication dimension and another as a communication skill that balances the automatic communication patterns of Aggression and Deference.

Assessment of Skills for Career And Life Effectiveness®

SCALE® PROFILE   [SCALE ID: 6064]

	DEVELOP	STRENGTHEN	ENHANCE	
	INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS			
SELF ESTEEM				SELF ESTEEM
	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS			
ASSERTION				ASSERTION
COMFORT				COMFORT
EMPATHY				EMPATHY
	CAREER and LIFE SKILLS			
DRIVE STRENGTH				DRIVE STRENGTH
DECISION MAKING				DECISION MAKING
TIME MANAGEMENT				TIME MANAGEMENT
INFLUENCE				INFLUENCE
COMMITMENT ETHIC				COMMITMENT ETHIC
	PERSONAL WELLNESS SKILLS			
STRESS MANAGEMENT				STRESS MANAGEMENT
PHYSICAL WELLNESS				PHYSICAL WELLNESS

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

INTERPERSONAL ASSERTION				INTERPERSONAL ASSERTION
INTERPERSONAL AGGRESSION				INTERPERSONAL AGGRESSION
INTERPERSONAL DEFERENCE				INTERPERSONAL DEFERENCE

PERSONAL CHANGE ORIENTATION

PERSONAL CHANGE ORIENTATION				PERSONAL CHANGE ORIENTATION

Figure 1. SCALE® Profile as presented by computer after taking the assessment (color removed).

Note: Our esteemed friend and mentoring maven, Margo Murray, contributed significantly to the understanding of SCALE® skills and dimensions. Margo's interpretation insights and research-derived learning suggestions for each skill are shared as clickable links that are embedded with each online SCALE® profile.

Instrument Reliability

The reliability of an instrument is important for several reasons and how reliable an instrument needs to be depends on application. For many applications, Cronbach's alpha (α) correlation coefficients in the range of .70 -.80 are sufficient (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2018). On the other hand, for use in clinical settings or to make employment decisions a reliability of .90 might not be considered reliable enough. According to Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), "For a test used to make a decision that affects some person's future, evaluators should attempt to find a test with a reliability greater than .95" (p. 123). The authors of the SCALE® caution against using their instruments for any purpose other than what they were intended, and they were designed as a way for helping professionals to engage clients in meaningful conversations about themselves (Nelson et al., 2016). The EILS instruments have been used successfully since the 1970s in this way by a myriad of professionals including teachers and instructors in secondary and post-secondary education settings, counselors, personal coaches, professional trainers, and others. The internal reliability alphas are reported for each SCALE® and each Emotional Skills Assessment Process® (ESAP®) scale in Table 3. The ESAP®, another of Nelson and Low's positive assessment instruments, has

demonstrated construct validity for measuring emotional intelligence, and the reason for including it in this article is to demonstrate concurrent construct validity for SCALE®.

Table 3
SCALE® and ESAP® Cronbach's alpha Reliability Statistics

	SCALE® (N = 98)		ESAP® (N = 98)		ESAP® (2004, N = 1,389)
	α	No. Items	α	No. Items	α
Self-Esteem	0.70	7	0.83	25	0.81
Assertion	0.75	7	0.82	18	0.60
Comfort	0.73	7	0.61	12	0.74
Empathy	0.85	7	0.90	12	0.79
Drive Strength	0.54	7	0.80	25	0.81
Decision Making	0.75	7	0.80	12	0.76
Time Management	0.86	7	0.91	12	0.82
Influence	0.71	7	0.81	12	0.82
Commitment Ethic	0.52	7	0.66	12	0.76
Stress Management	0.85	7	0.90	25	0.81
Physical Wellness	0.84	7	N/A	N/A	N/A
Aggression*	0.88	7	0.85	18	0.70
Deference*	0.83	7	0.89	18	0.75
Change Orientation*	0.77	7	0.84	12	0.75

Overall, the SCALE® provided strong evidence of internal reliability (Hammett, in press). The SCALE's composite measure of Interpersonal skills (combining Assertion, Comfort, & Empathy) was high (α > .80), as were the composite measures of Career and Life Skills (combining Drive Strength, Decision Making, Time Management, Influence, & Commitment Ethic), and Personal Wellness (combining Stress Management & Physical Wellness). The Problematic Indicator composite (combining Aggression, Deference, & Change Orientation) was also high. Finally, the overall reliability when combining all items less those making up the Problematic Indicators was very high (α = .94). Overall based on these reliability statistics, it can be said that the SCALE® assessment reliably measures the global and composite skills constructs purportedly assessed by the instrument.

Reliability statistics for the ESAP® are also provided in Table 2. Including them was necessary because it was the instrument used for the SCALE® validity comparisons (Hammett, in press). Its baseline statistics for reliability may also be informative, therefore, as a comparison to SCALE®. Overall, the ESAP® yielded very high internal estimates of reliability with all composite scales exceeding α = .92. Finally, combining the ten skills resulted in a total instrument skills reliability of α = .96. One likely reason for the slightly higher composite scale alphas for the ESAP® compared to SCALE® is the increased number of

items in each scale. Consider, for example, the 25 items that assess Stress Management for ESAP® compared to only 7 items for the same skill for SCALE®. As explained by Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018),

> According to the domain sampling model, each item in a test is an independent sample of the trait or ability being measured. The larger the sample [of items representing the domain], the more likely that the test will represent the true characteristic. In the domain sampling model, the reliability of a test increases as the number of items increases. (p. 124).

Most research texts indicate that reliability coefficients of .70 are sufficient for research. According to Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), Cronbach's alphas greater than .80 are very good, and Creswell (2003) proclaimed that anything above .90 is very high. Only two scales in the online SCALE were below .70 and all the composite scales were very good, indicating adequate internal reliability for practical use in the ways for which it was designed.

You may have noticed that we also included in the last column of Table 2 additional Cronbach's α reliability statistics from a much larger sample (Nelson et al., 2004). While the larger sample yielded higher reliability alphas on four scales, the more recent and much smaller sample yielded higher alphas on nine scales. One reason for the surprising performance with a much smaller sample may be that the automatic computer scoring of the online ESAP reduced testing error introduced by human scoring of the paper and pencil instrument in the larger sample.

SCALE® Validity

Evidence of instrument validity is provided by researchers to describe the construct(s) measured by the instrument. Creswell (2009) described the three primary kinds of instrument validity as (a) content validity (the amount of a particular constitute contained), (b) concurrent validity (the amount and strength the measure correlates with another measure with established content), and (c) construct validity (the extent to which the survey measures hypothetical constructs). Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), however, reminded us that as of the most recent edition of Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014) validity is no longer recognized in this way but rather it recognizes evidence for validity. Still, it can be instructive to talk about these long held validity categories when presenting evidence.

Instrument validity and reliability are related constructs. As shared by Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), attempting to provide evidence of test validity without reliability would be pointless because an unreliable test cannot logically be valid. Accordingly, for a test to be reliable, it should correlate more highly with itself than with any other test (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2018). Also, and with an eye toward validity, when constructs correlate very strongly from two different tests, then they are essentially measuring the same thing (Epstein, 2012). Before we can understand what SCALE® measures in terms of its relationship to ESAP®, what the ESAP® measures must first be established.

The ESAP® was first published in1998 and normed with first-year college students ($N = 1,398$) who participated in a Title V intervention program (Nelson & Low, 2004). Reliability and validity statistics were reported initially by Nelson et al. (2004) based on several studies with different populations. Using those PERL skills data, the EI intervention program that used the ESAP® was found to be significantly correlated with student achievement (Lu, 2008; Vela, 2003) and had statistically significant and qualitatively positive impacts for the students who participated (Potter, 2005). Since then, ESAP® validity has also been reported by others including Cox and Nelson (2008), Dockrat (2012), Farnia (2012), Hammett et al. (2012), Justice et al. (2012), and Tang et al. (2010). Following is a summary of those findings.

Evidence of Convergent and Divergent Construct Validity for ESAP®

Nelson et al. (2004) reported the following based on empirical studies.

- Most ESAP® measures were not significantly correlated with IQ (Raven's Progressive Matrices). Also, even though Drive Strength, Time Management, and Commitment Ethic were significantly related to school achievement, those correlations were quite weak. Taken together, this evidence supports Nelson and Low's definition of EI in terms of a confluence of learned skills and abilities, as well as their caution to avoid defining emotional intelligence in terms of fixed ability or traits (i.e., EI ≠ EQ or IQ).

- All thirteen ESAP® scales were significantly related to mental health as measured by the 16PF®. The ten skills were positively related to mental health and the three problematic indicators (Aggression, Deference, and Change Orientation) were significantly negatively related to mental health. The results from this study support the overarching claim that the items used in their instruments reflect healthy and effective being in the world (Nelson et al., 2004). Because the problematic indicators represent reactive rather than reflective thinking and behaving, these results also support Nelson and Low's Emotional Learning System (2004, 2011); a five-step systematic learning framework that encourages reflection rather than reaction to develop emotional intelligence skills.

- The ESAP® was also significantly related to Epstein's Constructive Thinking Inventory® (CTI®), which is a reliable and valid test for measuring personality health in terms of his cognitive-experiential self-theory (CEST). This finding was confirmed and strengthened by Cox and Nelson (2008). The ESAP® skills were positively and significantly related to Constructive Thinking, and negatively related to destructive thinking patterns measured by CTI®. In addition, the ESAP® problematic measure of Aggression was positively correlated with the destructive thinking patters of Distrust of Others and Categorical Thinking measured by CTI®. Interestingly, Epstein noted that constructive thinking was the key to emotional intelligence, and based on these convergent and divergent empirical findings, Nelson and Low would agree. In fact, based on these findings combined with other parallels that emerged through the collegial friendship developed with Epstein, Nelson and Low coined their short definition of emotional intelligence as *The learned ability to think constructively and act wisely*. As a result, Epstein's CEST theory of personality remains an important framework of EILS's EI certification and EI coaching workshops.

Farnia (2012) reported the positive relationship between total ESAP® problem areas (Aggression + Deference + Change Orientation), and total EI (adding the ten skills) with the mastery of English as a second language as measured by the paper-based Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The convenience sample included Iranian adult learners of English ($N = 84$) at the Kish Language School in Tehran, Iran. Total EI was significantly positively related to TOEFL performance and the summated EI problem areas was significantly negatively related to TOEFL performance. In addition, the ESAP® Personal Leadership, Self-management, and Intrapersonal domains were significantly positively related to TOEFL performance. Only three of the 13 ESAP® scales (Assertion, Decision Making, & Change Orientation) did not significantly differentiate high and low TOEFL performers.

Dockrat (2012) administered the ESAP® to first-year college students ($N = 1,990$) at a technology university in South Africa. Her findings confirmed the factor structure and yielded strong internal consistency coefficients. An interesting aspect of this study was the comparison of the profiles from first-year students in South Africa and first-year students from south Texas. The average profiles of the

students from both groups looked very similar, despite having experienced very different cultures and languages, and having been reared on the opposite sides of the globe. This finding suggests that the ESAP® model reliably measures a global human construct.

Hammett et al. (2012) reported findings of the ESAP® skills' ability to differentiate leadership quality among U. S. Air Force (USAF) officers *(N* = 1,213) based on the officers' participation in a five-week residency course on leadership development. The participants had a minimum of four years of service to be selected for the course. The officers were given the assessment during the first week of the course and then the top and bottom 10% of the graduates were compared based on their assessment scores upon graduation. Eleven of the 13 ESAP® scores were statistically significantly different based on course performance. The only two scales that did not significantly differentiate the top and bottom performers were Stress Management and Aggression. It was surmised by the authors, therefore, that the USAF must be very good at selecting for and developing these skills throughout its officer corps.

Hammett et al. (in press) conducted a follow-up study with the USAF officers after the leadership course transitioned to teaching the full-range leadership model using the Leadership Development Scale (LDS). The LDS was developed to measure a priori leadership preferences of the officers including Laissez Faire, Management by Exception (Passive), Management by Exception (Active), and Contingent Reward, as well as the four dimensions of transformational leadership: Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Individualized Consideration. The laissez-faire style was confirmed as a non-leadership approach through its statistically significant negative correlations with ESAP® skills and positive correlations with ESAP® problematic indicators. Furthermore, this research confirmed the findings by Tang et al. (2010) that Nelson and Low's measures of emotional intelligence are strongly, significantly correlated with transformational leadership.

Emotional Intelligence as a Learning Framework

What do these studies tell us about the extent to which the ESAP® measures emotional intelligence? This question cannot be answered without an operational definition of EI, so let's begin there. Our short definition of EI is the learned ability to think constructively and act wisely (Nelson et al., 2013). The strong and significant correlations with Epstein's CEST model, the CTI, provided convergent validity of the ESAP® as an EI-centric measure based on constructive thinking. These strong and significant correlations also provide discriminant validity of the ESAP® as a measure of skills that can be taught, learned, and practiced above and beyond automatic thinking and personality as defined by CEST. Also related to personality and mental health, the positive relationship of the ESAP® with the validated mental health scale, the 16PF, provided additional evidence that the ESAP® measures a construct related to healthy, effective being.

Nelson and Low's (2011) longer definition emphasized learned abilities and skills that facilitate the four healthy being domains of (a) accurate self-knowledge and appreciation, (b) a variety of healthy relationships, (c) working well with others, and (d) dealing healthily with the demands of everyday work and life. For Epstein, EI was the manifestation of constructive thinking. For Nelson and Low, based on their longer definition, EI is healthy being in the world (i.e., thinking well [healthily] and acting wisely).

According to Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), another form of validity evidence is provided when a reliable instrument is used in practice to achieve positive ends. The purpose of the self-assessment items that Nelson and Low created in the 1970s was to facilitate meaningful conversations with people about themselves. As such, the ESAP®, its predecessor instruments, and the positive assessments they have developed since have been used reliably to engage people in meaningful conversations that encourage them to acknowledge their personal strengths and to self-identify specific personal skill opportunities for growth, a necessary step in developing accurate self-knowledge and appreciation. Through the skill of

Positive Change–the reframed problem indicator of Change Orientation–willing clients are then guided to create action plans to understand, learn, and apply specific skills for developing and maintaining relationships, working well with others, and healthily coping with the pressures of everyday work and life.

Nelson and Low, their students, colleagues, and associates have conducted hundreds of classes and workshops that used their positive assessment instruments in this way. Beyond this practical, positive application, their assessment instruments have generated a plethora of research that has not only added to our knowledge of what EI is (or can be), but has also provided a research vehicle used by many doctoral students to hone their own research skills and finish a terminal degree, another very positive outcome of using the instruments. You are invited to visit the Bibliography tab on our website (Emotional Intelligence Learning Systems, 2020) to review a list of research articles, theses, and dissertations that have been completed using Nelson and Low's assessment models and theory of healthy being. Based on this evidence from practice, research, and observations, it can be said with confidence that the ESAP® measures a skills-based form of emotional intelligence, what the authors have begun to call transformative emotional intelligence.

We have observed with interest the aforementioned studies that connect Nelson and Low's EI assessment models to authentic, helpful leadership practices. Recall that many PERL skills measured by ESAP® demonstrated significant positive correlations with transformational leadership, and its problematic indicators demonstrated significant negative correlations with non-leadership (i.e., laissez-faire). PERL skills were also positively correlated with leadership quality as assessed by class standing in the USAF Squadron Officer leadership course. How then, can we explain leadership in terms of emotional intelligence? The answer is grounded in Nelson and Low's (2011) longer definition of EI. It is not difficult to envision how a good leader engenders the four dimensions of EI by using PERL skills to facilitate practicing the four dimensions of transformational leadership. For example, accurate self-knowledge and appreciation are emboldened using PERL skills that facilitate Individualized Consideration. Intellectual Stimulation and Idealized Influence are facilitated through PERL skills related to having a variety of healthy relationships and working well with others. Finally, dealing healthily with the demands of everyday work and life is enabled using the same PERL skills that facilitate Inspirational Motivation. These observations, combined with the growing use of our assessment models and learning materials in U.S. military leadership courses, prompted us to write a text on this topic (Low et al., 2019). Through our lens of EI, leadership is operationalized as *positive influence*.

Concurrent Content and Construct Validity of SCALE®

In a recent validation study by Hammett (in press), of the 247 inter-scale bivariate correlations produced by comparing the SCALE® and ESAP® composite and total score measures, only 22 (8.90%) were not statistically significant. Of the remaining 225 bivariates, 213 (86%) were statistically significant at the highest levels ($p < .001$) and 12 (5%) were statistically significant at the lessor level ($p < .01$). From this study and others, SCALE® has produced adequate evidence of content and construct validity for measuring emotional intelligence as defined by the authors.

An Integrated EI-Centric Model for Professional Coaching

> Our definition of *Professional Coaching* — a person-centered relationship
> that uses a research-derived framework to facilitate purposeful, productive
> behavioral change from the perspective of the client.

Positive and skills-based, our coaching framework is organized around the four affective learning domains and related key skills of emotional intelligence shown in Table 1. Coaches know that coaching is not teaching or advice giving. Our brief transformative EI definition is a learned ability to *think*

constructively, and act wisely. Coaching is a professional relationship process for positive, meaningful learning with clear, purposeful goals set and pursued by clients with the help of their coach.

As noted above, a contemporary influence for us has been the life's work of Seymour Epstein. We agree with Epstein (1998) that a healthy learning and being philosophy requires a two-mind (rational-cognitive and experiential-emotional) process. Research has confirmed strong relationships among the major components of constructive thinking (Epstein, 1998, 2012), reflective thinking (Nelson & Low, 201) most emotional skills (Cox, 2013; Cox & Nelson, 2008), and leadership (Hammett et al., in press; Hammett et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2010). From a coaching perspective, healthy growth and productive being is not possible when the two minds are not in balance.

The ***Emotional (Intelligence) Learning System (ELS)*** was created to provide an integrated, authentic, and practical approach for understanding, developing, and applying/modeling emotional intelligence skills. The learning model works well for developing and delivering effective coaching practices. We describe, share, and illustrate this engaging, dynamic learning process in the sections that follow. We include a brief background of our research, work, development of our transformative theory of coaching, ELS learning model, connections of assessment to accepted competences of professional coaching applications, and examples of EI-centric coaching programs.

A Transformative Theory of Coaching

Our coaching theory emphasizes the potential for building quality within the person and achieving personal goals. In the action learning process, specific and essential conditions for positive personal change are observed. Our necessary conditions for learning and change encompass a set of beliefs and features that create an environment that engenders learning and positive change. From our book on emotional intelligence (Nelson & Low, 2011), the necessary conditions for learning and change that facilitate effective coaching include:
• Acknowledge each person as competent with dignity, worth, and potential.
• Commit to responsible growth and effective behaviors.
• Emphasize the skills and competencies of emotional intelligence.
• Empower each person to make positive changes and move forward in life.
• Respect the capacity of each person to achieve excellence.
• Identify and organize specific skills sets that can be easily learned and applied.
• Base learning and development on honest self-assessment and your internal frame of reference.
• Demystify emotional behavior by learning new ways to think, act, and feel.

We view the person as an integrated system of mind, body, and spirit. Constructive thinking processes and emotional intelligence skills are keys to high achievement, career success, personal wellness, and well being. Our theory and coaching models are structured around key personal, emotional, relational, life skills, behaviors, and strategies. Dynamic learning and personal changes are meaningful human responses that strongly influence behavior and actions. Positive behavioral changes are the purposeful development of self assessment-awareness, reflective listening, and constructive thinking all guided by key skills (Nelson et al., 2013).

Our approach of transformative emotional intelligence (EI) parallels the coaching profession at large. No one theory fully explains the coaching process. Most approaches are eclectic and borrow theory and practice from cognitive, humanistic, behavioral, motivational, and/or transpersonal theories. Our theory is based on original research and practice with person-centered, relationship-focused, and skills-based learning through the lens of transformative EI. Positive assessment is a dynamic learning tool for reflection and engagement to develop an awareness to learn while aligning key skills and behaviors with coaching core competencies.

We view our models and the coaching profession as emergent, fluid, and transitioning with new knowledge. We respect and value the work and contributions of others, and enjoy collaborating with others to add to the benefits of coaching for individuals and teams. A growing history of experience and research studies include over 80 doctoral dissertations that support the enduring tenets and qualities of transformative learning and training. These tenets include
• positive, engaging human development philosophy and learning systems;

- research derived — four decades of studies with personal, emotional, relational, and life skills;
- person-centered with a *building quality from within* emphasis that identifies strengths first, and areas for improvement next;
- relationship focused; emphasizing skills for healthy relationships and social interactions when under pressure;
- behavioral anchors and focus for practicing skills daily;
- practical personal change system for adapting to change;
- intelligent self-direction and goal achievement.

Early Influences — Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, John Gardner

The influence of humanistic psychology has been important in the development of our model of transformative emotional intelligence. These thought change leaders can also inform discussions about effective coaching. With humanistic psychology, helping practitioners began emphasizing non-deficit models for being healthily human, and they used these models for helping individuals *per–fect* themselves based on the client's unique life goals and aspirations. Our interpreted goal of humanistic psychology is not so different from the helping goal of professional coaches; *to inspire clients to maximize their personal and professional potential*. As we strive and continue to develop, refine, and integrate a holistic theory of human behavior evolving from research on healthy, productive being, we want to acknowledge the early influences of the theories, thoughts, and works of Carl Rogers (1995), Abraham Maslow (1954), John Gardner (1961, 1963), and others.

Carl Rogers' lifelong interest of a fully functioning person, client-centered learning, acceptance, and positive change inspired our own interest in these topics and in his work. We learned about Dr. Rogers and his significant body of classic works and influence from readings, doctoral studies from caring faculty, and from students of Rogers at the University of Wisconsin. Our colleague, Darwin Nelson met Rogers at a national counseling convention in Dallas in 1967 and later visited with him in La Jolla with insightful discussions about our positive assessment and person-centered learning framework. Genuine, authentic relationships are at the center of emotional learning and positive change. Reflective listening and core conditions of inner growth, congruence, empathy, and positive regard are behavioral reflections of personal health and well-being. We see the conditions of person-centered, relationship-focused learning as key personal and emotional skills that guide wise actions and positive personal change.

Recall Rogers's (1995) curious paradox that, "When I accept myself just as I am, then I change" (p. 17). The quotation reflected his understanding that when he accepted himself as decidedly imperfect yet still caring and growth-oriented, *then* he could be more present and aware of what he was feeling at any given time for the purpose of using those feelings to connect more meaningfully with others. The curious paradox reflects a kind of dynamic self-awareness that is important to the practice of coaching with emotional intelligence. Professional coaches who inculcate emotional intelligence in their work, work continually with themselves and their clients to engender the curious paradox on a personal level to pursue meaningful goals.

Along with Rogers, Abraham Maslow (1954) piqued our interest in healthy, positive human conditions. For Maslow, these included motivation, needs, and the growth of the person. We see value in helping individuals develop to be their best version of self, especially in relationships with others. Striving to grow and develop our abilities to the fullest is important for achieving balance and equilibrium. As shown in Figure 2, each of the key humanistic models that have influenced the development of our transformative theory of emotional intelligence can be shown to strive for equilibrium by balancing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems of being human (Hammett, 2013). You may recognize the zeniths of fully being human described by Maslow's self-actualizing (Panel A), Rogers's fully functioning person (Panel B), and Epstein's cognitive-experiential self (Panel C). Congruent with these models, our transformative approach adds three ways of modeling EI through active imagination, self-directed coaching, and guided mentoring (Panel D). As demonstrated in our explanation of using the ELS that follows, we integrate this humanistic framework of healthy being with positive assessment through the ELS to help shape productive coaching relationships.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes a process of growth and motivation that we view as important for relating the TEI principle of interdependence for developing healthy, productive relationships, key

emotional-life skills, and constructive thinking. Our view of the relationship between Maslow's hierarchy and our current views from research derived, person-centered, relationship-focused, and skills-based models of human behavior and life development are shared in Table 4. Note the PERL skills measured by SCALE® in the third column.
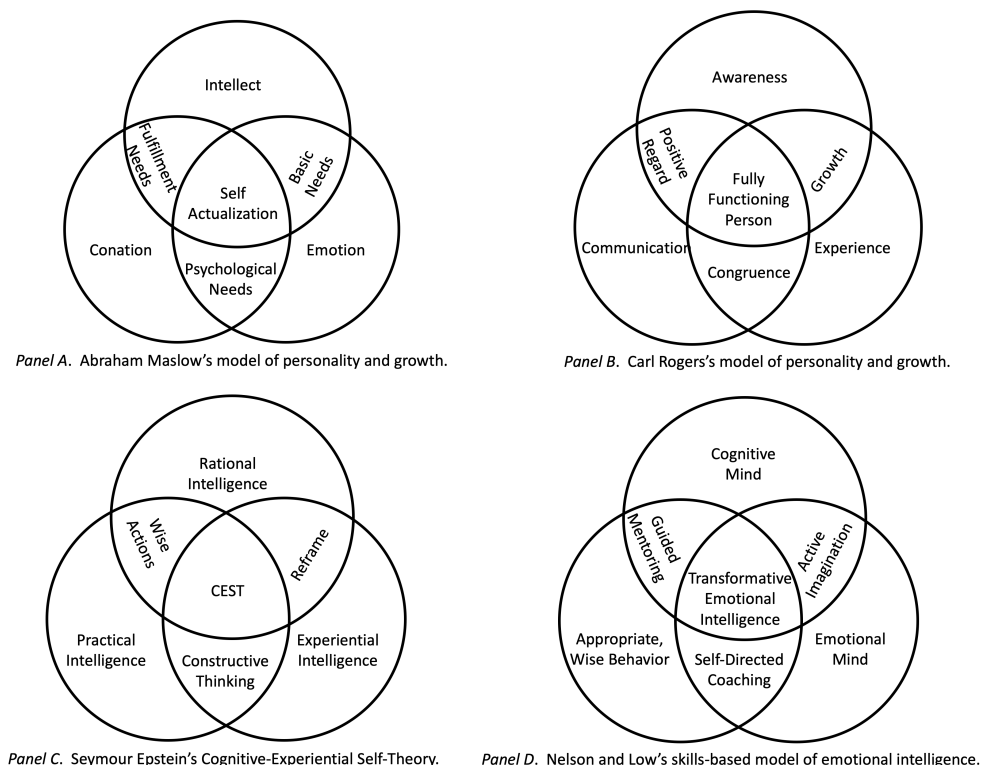
Panel A. Abraham Maslow's model of personality and growth.

Panel B. Carl Rogers's model of personality and growth.

Panel C. Seymour Epstein's Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory.

Panel D. Nelson and Low's skills-based model of emotional intelligence.

Figure 2. Models that have shaped our transformative approach of emotional intelligence. Adapted with permission from R. Hammett (2013).

Table 4.

Work and Life Excellence: Needs, Beliefs, and EI Skills

Need Types	Related Beliefs	PERL Skills
Survival	Obtain pleasure and avoid pain in fulfilling physiological needs essential to life and well being	Anger Management, Anxiety Management, Stress Management, and Self Esteem
Safety	To make sense out of your experience and develop consistency and stability in how the world is viewed	Self Esteem, Stress Management, Positive Personal Change, Physical Wellness
Relationship	To seek meaningful connections and emotionally satisfying relationships with others	Assertion, Comfort, Empathy, Leadership, and Self Esteem
Self Esteem	To believe that one has value, worth, and dignity; to develop high self esteem	Self Esteem
Equilibrium	To seek balance and harmony when we experience distress or perceive deficits	Anger Management, Anxiety Management, Stress Management, and Self Esteem
Growth	To commit to continuous growth and change as we seek to develop our best self	Self Esteem, Achievement Drive, Positive Personal Change, Physical Wellness

Note: Maslow's (1954) contribution established a frame of reference for thinking about motivation that focuses on the subjective experience of the individual. Our connection, interpreted through related beliefs, emphasizes PERL skills that individuals can use to encounter, satisfy, and when necessary revisit needs in pursuit of personal growth.

John Gardner's books, *Excellence: Can We Be Excellent and Equal, Too?* (1961) and *Self-Renewal* (1963) were carried with us for years. We accepted his challenge to answer this and other important questions and in the process constructed a healthy model for achieving personal excellence. As a result, our belief

today is that there are good ways to approach excellence and equality when we learn to: (a) create personal standards of guiding ethics with intentional, positive, emotional skills to pursue skills-based change; (b) set, establish, and pursue personal goals daily to achieve positive, skills-based change; and (c) develop/use constructive thinking to shape wise behavior with PERL skills for positive personal change. These three research-derived guiding principles that we developed based on Gardner's initial challenge can be useful to inform professional coaching as coaches work with their clients to maximize potential. In short, we agree with Gardner that there are multiple ways of measuring people. According to Gardner (1961),

> There is a way of measuring excellence that involves comparison between people–some are musical geniuses and some are not; and there is another that involves comparison between myself at my best and myself at my worst. It is the latter comparison which enables me to assert that I am being true to the best that is in me–or forces me to confess that I am not. (p. 128)

From our perspective, it is important to include a discussion about our background because those meaningful experiences provided the framework for us to develop our positive assessment instruments and our approach for using them in professional coaching scenarios. With that background, we now turn our attention to our emotional learning system, a model that we integrate with positive assessment in our professional coaching practice.

Using the Emotional Learning System and Positive Assessment in Professional Coaching

Our five-step approach to learning and applying emotional intelligence is valued by coaches who desire a systematic process for assisting themselves and their clients in the personally meaningful development of important PERL skills. Presented in Figure 3, the Emotional (Intelligence) Learning System (ELS) embeds Rogers's curious paradox by acknowledging the importance of experiencing feelings through reflection (moving from receiving emotional information clockwise) rather than reacting to feelings (moving counter-clockwise and the wrong direction). An initial conscious decision is required to interrupt the impulse to react to strong feelings in favor of following the emotionally reflective path of the ELS. That critical decision reengages the cognitive mind and begins to rebalance a system that is in an unbalanced state (review Figure 2, Panel D). Positive change is best achieved when it is self-directed and personally meaningful, and so the ELS focuses on the internal frame of reference throughout the learning process.
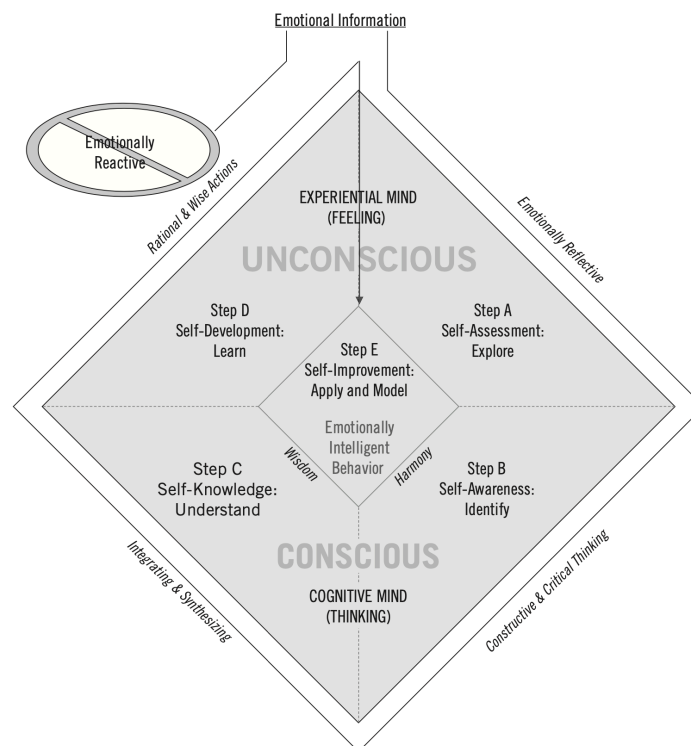

Figure 3. The Emotional Learning System published in D. Nelson and G. Low's
Emotional Intelligence: Achieving Academic and Career Excellence (Pearson
Education, 2011). Reprinted with author permission.

Explore

We see exploration through self-assessment as the necessary first step in a positive change process. Many learning models omit this vital first step, and then educators/coaches can wonder why some of their students/clients act bored, become disillusioned, or complain that the discussions are not relevant to them. Without facilitated self-exploration, the coach will fail to invite the client to engage meaningfully in the coaching process. Conversely, by beginning with Explore, the coach is reminded to invoke the initial core competencies used by all successful coaches; to (a) set the foundation through ethical practices and a coaching mindset, and (b) co-create the relationship by establishing and maintaining agreements and cultivating trust and safety. Beyond engendering engagement and reminding us about some of the core competencies for successful coaching, the explore step is recommended as an integral debriefing tool for helping coaches interpret the results of any formal assessment instrument that may be used with their clients. When using positive assessment we begin by establishing whether the client thinks the assessment results reflect an accurate picture of how they see themselves. If yes, then we move to the next Identify step. If not, then a conversation and possible additional assessments are needed to resolve gaps.

Identify

Following a positive assessment philosophy and a non-deficit helping model, we encourage coaches to assist their clients by first helping them develop accurate self-awareness by identifying their strengths. Which EI dimensions and PERL skills do they claim as strengths that contribute to their current levels of success and performance? Note that this discussion can include other kinds of skills as well, and the kinds of skills being discussed will depend on the context (i.e., purpose) of the coaching relationship. Record in some way the client's identified strengths. Next, move the discussion to opportunities for growth. Co-discover with the client the skill areas or dimensions they would like to work to improve. Record those as well before moving to the next step.

The emotional mind's job is to protect the self and it thinks critically quickly and automatically to do so. In the Identify step we introduce constructive thinking back into the equation to compliment critical thinking, thereby regaining some equilibrium between the three systems.

Understand

To engender self-knowledge we focus on developing personal understanding about the skills being discussed. A good way to accomplish this task is to encourage the client to integrate and synthesize the skills by focusing on active imagination to develop EI (Figure 2, Panel D). Again, we begin with strengths. Ask the client to imagine and explain how a strength identified in the previous step helps them with their current levels of performance. You might ask them to describe a situation where they used the skill and then pursue the conversation to increase the granularity of the client's mental picture of using the skill. What behaviors were involved? How did their skilled behaviors make others feel? What feelings did they experience as a result of using the skill? When appropriate, shift the conversation back to one of the skills the client identified as an opportunity for growth. Follow the same process to assist the client in imagining how developing that skill will enhance their current levels of performance. It may be necessary to help the client find words to articulate this aspect of the conversation because they may not yet understand the identified opportunity for growth other than seeing it as a deficit. Whenever possible, encourage the client to do most of the talking.

Learn

In the Learn step the focus shifts to self-development. Transition from Understand to Learn by assisting the client to create an action learning plan that will be followed to develop the identified growth opportunity. The three essential components of an action learning plan include (a) the identification of one or more specific examples from each of the three ways (active imagination, guided mentoring, & self-directed coaching) of developing PERL skills, (b) a timeline with periodic progress checks for accountability, and (c) a business case or actual instance where the client will develop a plan or project to apply the new skill. For guided mentoring, the client (assisted by the coach if necessary) should identify a person who can serve as a mentor in the development of that specific skill. When appropriate (i.e., the

coach is skilled in that area and mentoring is included in the coaching agreement), the coach may be identified to serve in this capacity.

Apply/Model

The business case or project can be a wonderful reinforcing experience for the development and use of the identified skill. As our colleague and friend Margo Murray has reminded us, PERL skills can be understood and acknowledged as important, and we can still not use them as often or as well as we would like. The integrated and sequential ELS is designed to lead coaches and clients to first apply PERL skills. Then, moving the skill from the conscious to the unconscious, the goal is to model the skill daily and in complex situations.

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Key Learning Points

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The ELS embraces a person-centered, relationship focused, skills-based practice with the client at the center and focal point of the coaching process from Explore to Apply. Positive assessment instruments and methods ensure the process is centered on the client from the very beginning. Along the way, personal goals requiring personal changes are identified by each client. Like most coaches, we share optimistic views of people, their motivations, needs, and their aspirations to achieve life and career effectiveness. People are highly capable of making positive changes, and developing skills and strategies to reframe change to a practical process to follow when they have a process to do so. We share the following EI-centric principles to illustrate key elements of the ELS for our transformative coaching theory and practice.
- Ultimate goal is happiness engendered through positive change.
- Client is capable of intelligent self-direction with skills related to the change desired.
- Change is constant and emotions are involved in every personal change.
- Emotional mind is the lead system in human behavior and especially related to change.
- People desire healthy, successful, productive outcomes in their life and career.
- Emotions as energy sources may be positive or negative. An important consideration for coaches.
- Constructive thinking is key to embody emotional connections to produce effective change.
- Emotional reactivity often leads to ineffective behaviors. Reflective dialogue and skills help.
- Coach provides support and protection as client learns and practices new behaviors.
- The coach-client relationship is a vehicle for positive personal change and development.

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Application

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The emerging profession of coaching is clearly not a one size fits all solution. There are many talents, skills, and experiences that coaches use as frameworks for offering coaching services to meet the goals of individuals who seek coaching. There are many important reasons and connections for coaches working to address and assist clients achieve specific goals that are meaningful to them. As a growing profession, there are many applications and types of coaching. Some of these are provided as follows:
- Individual, group, team
- Supervisory, management
- Life and personal growth
- Business
- Executive
- Health, wellness, managing pressure
- Academic and work performance
- Relationship in families and teams
- Performance improvement
- Emotional intelligence
- Career and life

An EI certification workshop is offered annually in conjunction with our EI summit. Coaches are interested primarily in the SCALE® assessment, as well as other positive assessment products that complement their preferred area of client focus. This differentiated interest led to writing our book on professional coaching (Nelson et al., 2013), which we published for inclusion as a text in a three-course graduate sequence at the University of Houston-Victoria. Table 4 is provided to summarize our EI-centric

assessment products with their typical applications to demonstrate the wide applicability for combining positive assessment with the ELS in the professional coaching field. As outlined in this article, we recommend a triad of essential tools for effective professional coaching. The tools include positive assessment, a sound theoretical framework, and a systematic learning model that engages the client in a personally meaningful action learning process that builds quality from within.

Table 4.

EI-Centric Assessments and Typical Coaching Uses

Instrument	Education Version	Primary Uses	Available Online
Emotional Skills Assessment Process® (ESAP®)	✔	Secondary and Higher Education	✔
ESAP-A/B®	✔	Education & Research	✘
Personal Excellence Map® (PEM®)	✘	Leadership Development	✘
Skills for Career And Life Effectiveness® (SCALE®)	✘	Mentoring & and PERL Skills Development	✔
Resiliency Skills Assessment Process® (ReSAP®)	✘	Resiliency Development	✘
Sales Skills Assessment Process® (SaSAP®)	✘	Sales Improvement Development	✘
Service Excellence Skills Assessment Process® (SESAP®)	✘	Development of Service Excellence	✘

Note: Adapted from EI Learning Systems' Assessment Guide used in EI Certification and EI Coaching workshops.

Exemplar Conversations With EI-Centric Coaches[2]

Professional Coach #1

More than a decade of rich interactions spawned by using EILS's positive assessments and coaching methodology has been defining in my evolution as a successful coach in India. Positive assessment instruments intrigued me as an internal coach and in my consulting practice as a coach. Combined, they have helped clients and me discover and recognize skill strengths and improve opportunities for growth by exploring emotions, thoughts, and actions. Improvement is initialized by combining compelling insights with interrelated emotional intelligence skill areas. Creating awareness, reflection with introspection, aided by positive assessment, helps to understand the subliminal systems which give rise to productive or unproductive emotions and results in actions which could either be proud of or become a source of regret.

I have used these powerful psychometric tools to help achieve coaching goals for clients in Fortune 500 companies and others as well. Every participant taking the instrument found it simple to chart, easy to understand, and help formulate pragmatic action plans to enhance their strengths or improve on competencies in areas of opportunity. Many, in the hundreds of participants, have witnessed a marked improvement in the quality of relationships at the personal and professional fronts and talked of improved cognitive capacity due to the effective regulation of disruptive emotions. They have shared how the instrument helped them to create a vision and then work on a template of positive, desired, and intentional (conscious) change.

As a coach and EI consultant, I recommend the assessment tools for enabling participants to discover themselves, becoming aware of limiting mindsets and mental models, plan actions to achieve their desired

results and record for continued success. Coaches can effectively partner with their clients in a manner that is supportive but not intrusive. I thank Darwin Nelson, Gary Low, and Richard Hammett for helping me achieve my coaching goals that including helping others in personally meaningful ways.

Professional Coach #2

For years I've worked with clients who stop their 5 mile run to catch their breath and then smoke; people who get a child's plate in a restaurant and then leave to binge eat in private; people who use their exercise equipment for hanging racks; people who have covert postal package drop offs to hide their spending from their spouse, and on and on. Therein, it seems that we all cognitively KNOW better, but then we get hijacked by our emotional brains. In fact, one of the most powerful moments I've ever experienced was when Darwin [Dr. Nelson] had invited a few guests to a breakout room after the EI presentations during the annual conference. Incredibly successful people bared their struggles in front of complete strangers while seeking advice from him about how to rein in their emotions. I was totally speechless to hear that these really powerful people—some of whom were working on peace issues in the Middle East or navigating politics at the United Nations—were struggling with emotional, NOT cognitive, issues. And so perhaps that's why I like the idea of using the assessment profiles to assess emotional self, particularly in regards to ferreting out blind spots. But that seems to be only the declarative part of the knowledge, then it seems that people must practice procedurally over an extended time to develop the behaviors while doing something real, particularly when the process was enhanced by a coach to remove stumbling blocks. To me, hearing about learning styles never came close to holding that degree of power.

Our Response

We appreciate your observations about the facades people create to camouflage emotional crutches that likely embarrass them. Helping people reveal and cope skillfully with emotional questions was one of many wonderful strengths that Darwin possessed and frequently practiced during our workshops and conferences. I agree with your experience and with Dr. Low's emphasis about the positive contributions of the emotional system when combined with positive change facilitated by a good coach or mentor. So, while the challenges may not be cognitive ones, there is a need to involve the cognitive system to find equilibrium for the feeling side. If left to their own coping strategies, the equilibrium that people create for themselves can look precarious, or even maladaptive to outsiders. As Darwin once observed to me, they are just trying to change how they feel. He also noted that often they are either stuck in the past or overly focused on the future, and a good coach skillfully brings them into the present. Personally, I always found it interesting and somewhat reassuring that in Seymour Epstein's cognitive-experiential self-theory, peculiar coping mechanisms are considered okay; even healthy, as long as they do not harm self or others.

While it is important for a coach to understand the different learning styles and attempt to engage clients based on their best ways to learn, there is a difference between having cognitive knowledge about emotions and developing intelligent emotions (Epstein, 2012). As you pointed out, the change comes through personally meaningful and intentional practice to develop new, healthy habits. For this reason, our five-step emotional learning system is meant to actively guide the coach and client in a dynamic, engaging, and ongoing learning process that can be applied multiple times each and every day. When combined with an action learning plan that can span weeks or even months, guided mentoring, self-directed coaching, and active imagination; especially when guided by a skilled coach, are wonderful ways to learn and develop one's emotional intelligence.

Conclusion and Invitation

We have learned that our positive assessment instruments can easily be used and applied by others in their coaching practice. We invite you to consider how the SCALE® could be adapted to complement your own professional services. As the profession continues to develop, we support the profession being based on competency models with key skills and learning processes that are supported by research. Creating the best conditions for positive change and coaching practice that address client goals are vital. Our research supports the value of a dynamic, engaging coaching relationship and process guided by systematic, sequential, and integrated learning (ELS). The process starts with assessment and the explore step to

ensure goals of the client are clearly understood. We have found a helping relationship with the client is established easier and faster when the internal frame of the client is respected with positive assessment.

We are collaborative in philosophy and practice. We created the Emotional Intelligence Training and Research Institute (EITRI) as a collegial association to encourage sharing, dialogue, and collaborations with good colleagues. With encouragement and support of students, friends, and EITRI colleagues, we created, planned, and convened the annual Institute for Emotional Intelligence each year since 2004.

Accordingly, we value and appreciate feedback regarding this article and invite you to share new research, studies, and practices with transformative EI. We publish and disseminate EITRI News on a fairly regular basis and *The International Journal of Transformative Emotional Intelligence*. We look forward to meeting some of you in the future.

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To learn more, please visit their EI Learning Systems website at https://www.eilearningsys.com or their professional association website for the Emotional Intelligence Training and Research Institute at https://www.eitri.org.

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