

# WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



## Emotional intelligence with Dan Goleman

**Jen Fisher (Jen):** Hi WorkWell listeners. I'm really excited to share that my book, *Work Better Together*, is officially out. Conversations with WorkWell guests and feedback from listeners like you inspired this book. It's all about how to create a more human-centered workplace. As we return to the office for many of us, this book can help you move forward into post pandemic life with strategies and tools to strengthen your relationships and focus on your well-being. It's available now from your favorite book retailer.

When I think about some of the best leaders I've known in my career, a couple of common themes pop up for me. They were all great listeners, they were empathetic, they cared about my personal well-being and the well-being of others, and they always had my back. These are also signs of emotional intelligence, also known as EQ. It's an essential leadership skill that can help you build meaningful connections in high-performing teams.

This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, chief well-being officer for Deloitte and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being. I'm here with Dr. Dan Goleman. He's an internationally known psychologist, science journalist, and codirector of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in organizations at Rutgers. He's also the author of the best-selling books, *Emotional Intelligence*, *Social Intelligence*, and *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*. Dan, welcome to the show.

**Dan Goleman (Dan):** Thanks. It's a pleasure to be here, Jen.

**Jen:** Can you tell us a little bit about who you are, your personal story, and why emotional intelligence. In my world, in my lifetime, especially I look at you as the father of emotional intelligence and everything I ever learned or started to read about the subject came from you. So, it's a real honor to have you on the show.

**Dan:** I think the best things in life happen by accident usually after you're writing for them. I've never planned to be Mr. Emotional Intelligence. It just happened. I started out. I got a doctorate in clinical psychology, but I've always loved writing and I was recruited out of graduate school pretty much to be an editor at a magazine that then was a very big magazine, *Psychology Today*. From there, I was recruited to the science section of *The New York Times* where I was a science writer, which is really what I wanted to do because I saw it as translating from a secret language of specialty in academic journals to a story that anybody could understand, that was interesting, that was meaningful, that helped people, I

thought really is a public education endeavor. So, I was doing that, and I realized that I was covering a lot of new science about emotions in the brain particularly, and I thought that would be a really great book and one of the articles I had read in an obscure journal was called emotional intelligence. I didn't make up the phrase. It was an article by a friend of mine, Peter Salovey, who's now the president of Yale University and his then graduate student, John Mayer. But I thought, 'Wow, that is such a terrific phrase. It's like an oxymoron. Intelligence can go with emotion.' I used that as the title of a book, which was about emotions and us, the brain and how it matters for us, self-awareness, self-management, empathy, our relationships, it's everywhere, and that became emotional intelligence.

Then, after I wrote that book, I got interested in how it mattered for work life. I had written a small chapter, *Managing with Heart*, in the book, *Emotional Intelligence*, but it got a huge response, particularly from the business community, and I thought, gee there's something here. I went back to something I had been doing in graduate school at Harvard with David McClelland, who was my main professor, which was what was then a new idea. It was called competency modeling. You look at the 10 percent top performers in any field by whatever metric made sense for that field, it could be engineering, it could be consulting, it could be a writing software, it didn't matter. Just look at the top 10 percent and then you analyze what do these top performers do that you don't see in people who are mediocre and that that would be the competency. What distinguishes them? It's not what everybody can do. Everybody can write code, but what makes someone influential as a code writer, for example? That becomes a competency itself and influence. So, I went back and looked at what competencies seem to be based on emotional intelligence, how we manage ourselves, how we handle our relationships, how we tune into other people, how we tune into ourselves, and what competencies are really purely cognitive, like software writing for example. That became the basis for another book about competency and emotional intelligence, "*Working with Emotional Intelligence*." Then, I did one for *Harvard Business Review* on leadership and emotional intelligence. I think they wanted me to do that book because I had written an article for them on the competencies of leaders. It was called, "*What Makes a Leader*." It went platinum essentially. It was the most requested reprint they had ever had in their history. So, it was clearly an interesting demand. So, after a while, I left *The New York Times* because I was too busy giving thoughts and so on on emotional intelligence. So, that was the accident that happened to me.

**Jen:** Got it. So, let's start with the basics. What are emotions and how do they impact us?

**Dan:** Emotions are the brain's way of making us pay attention to something it thinks is important and telling us in the feeling tone we get what to do about it? Something makes us depressed. We don't do much. Something makes us angry. We do maybe a lot, maybe too much. The emotional center, it's in our emotional repertoire, was designed in early human prehistory to help us survive. Today, that can be a problem because it marshals the same biological response. We secrete the stress hormones that prepare us for the fight or flight or freeze response that doesn't work in the modern office that well.

**Jen:** What is emotional intelligence and why is it important in life, but also in the workplace?

**Dan:** I think of it as being intelligent about emotion. How do you handle emotions? Emotions are important. They tell us, I have felt meaning moment to moment to moment. We take emotions with us everywhere, at home, at work. It doesn't matter where you are, you always feel something. Emotional intelligence is basically four parts: the way I see it, self-awareness, knowing what you're feeling; why you feel it; how it makes you think or perceive, what your impulse is because of that feeling; then managing

the feeling, particularly if it's going to get you in trouble. This is where it becomes very important at work because one of the things emotions were designed to do in the brain is hijack us and make us do what in evolution, we thought was essential to survive. Today, that might be not such a good thing to do because the emotional brain gets a fuzzy picture and it has an operational principle, I would rather be safe than sorry. It's like a hair trigger and it makes us fall back on overlearned responses, often childish.

At work, you can be thinking, 'This guy is not treating me fair. I would like to slug him.' That's the way the emotional centers think. If you're lucky, they'll put that together with information that goes to the more rational prefrontal area, the brain's executive, and it will add the piece of information that, 'Oh, you know, this is your boss. So, maybe okay, I'll smile and change the subject.' So, that's being intelligent about emotion. That's the second part, managing emotions, not just handling disruptive ones, but also keep them focused on your goals, staying flexible, being able to come up with an innovative response, for example, staying positive, realizing you can get better, people can get better. That's called a growth mindset these days. Then, another part is empathy, tuning into other people. Here, it's important to know there are three kinds of empathy. One is purely cognitive. I get how you think about this. I understand your perspective. This helps me message very well with you. I can say things in terms I know you'll understand, but there's another kind of empathy, which is emotional empathy. I feel what you feel, and this helps me be more attuned to you to have rapport. Then, there is a third kind of empathy, which is concern or caring. It makes me want to be kind, to help you. That's the kind of empathy you want in your colleagues and your boss and your spouse and the people in your life, but each of them is based in a different part of the brain circuitry. Then, you can use that empathy for effective relationships, to help guide people, to influence them, to inspire them, to resolve conflicts, to be a good team player, things like that.

**Jen:** When it comes to the workplace, I mean there's such a sordid history around emotions in the workplace, I think the most common that I hear, maybe not so much anymore, but the workplace is no place for emotions, only show positive emotions in the workplace, positive vibes only. I guess what's your perspective on that or what's the danger or the fallacy in that?

**Dan:** Sometimes people think emotional intelligence is the same as always being nice, I agree and disagree with that. The reason of this that just keeping things harmonious is good, but it's not enough. I think instead of just being nice, you need to be kind. To be kind, you may have to tell somebody something they don't really want to hear, give feedback that might disturb someone's equanimity, but it will help them do better. You see this in performance feedback, which by the way is very often done poorly, but one of the good things that can come from performance feedback is helping someone hear what it is they would benefit from improving. That's being kind I would say. Being nice is never telling them in the first place that they need to improve, and I don't think that's useful in the workplace.

**Jen:** In your view, emotional intelligence is it innate? Is it something that we all have? I know it's something that can be learned or practiced. How do we practice it? How do we tune into it? Are all people emotionally intelligent? I don't think so. I've come across many who aren't.

**Dan:** Let me unpack that.

**Jen:** Please do.

**Dan:** It was three different questions. One is the nature-nurture question. Then, I'm going to come back to you Jen and say what were those other two questions what we have. The nature-nurture, the fact is that we're all born with emotional capacities. They vary greatly person to person. As you said, the good news is that all of this is learned and learnable. So, you're given set points for your neurotransmitters in the brain that determine whether you're outgoing, whether you're shy, and so on, but all of that can be changed with learning. This is where helping people get better at emotional intelligence is so important because people can improve, but there are several basic steps to improving. The first one is ask yourself or the person do you really care, because it takes little time and little effort. There's a window of opportunity for kids, and this is why I'm a big advocate of getting this into schools and what's called social-emotional learning, helping kids get it right in the first place because the emotional and social centers of the brain are the last part of the brain to become anatomically mature. We can help kids get better at managing their impulses, for example. It's called cognitive control. It's a very important ability, and it's shaped in childhood. Kids can learn to do better. Cognitive control predicts your financial success in your 30s, your health in the 30s. Cognitive control at midlife predicts your longevity. It's a really important ability, and it's part of emotional intelligence. It's learned and learnable. So, the first step is do you care?

The second step is what are you really good at and what are you not so good at? Emotional intelligence is a profile of strengths and weaknesses across all the competencies. So, maybe you need to get better at listening. This is really the common goal of management. People tend to feel like I don't have time for this. So, they interrupt someone who comes to see them and take over the conversation. Maybe you want to listen someone out. That means you have to do the third thing, which is develop a learning plan for yourself, essentially a step you're going to take to change a habit and the old habit is interrupting and taking over the conversation. The new habit is listening people out before you speak what you have to say and that takes time, takes patience to get there. It helps sound some support. You need support because you're going to have bad days and when you have a bad day, you want to go back and review what happened and prepare yourself for the next time that comes around, for example. So, it helps to have someone to talk to, someone to practice with. Then finally, there's practicing at every naturally occurring opportunity, which by the way may be with your kids, your teenager, may not be at work. The brain doesn't distinguish. So, you can practice whenever the chance comes along. You had a third question. I've forgot what you asked.

**Jen:** No, actually I think you answered all three of them in your answer. So, I appreciate that, but let's dig into this further. In the workplace, you mentioned emotional intelligence and learning emotional intelligence or developing those skills at the top of the house or leadership level. Why is it important for leaders I guess in particular, but what I'm also hearing you say is that it's important for everybody in the workplace?

**Dan:** I'm just doing an article that reviews all of the biennially critical mass findings on emotional intelligence, and it shows that when leaders are emotionally intelligent, the people they're leading do much better by whatever metric you use. People will work harder and will help other people out, will be more engaged. There are many, many metrics of this. So, it helps the organization when leaders are more emotionally intelligent, but also it's a system and you want to shape an emotionally intelligent culture, you want to have it at every level to get maximum impact from it. That's why I'm interested in the part of the organization that's below the top of the house because there are ways to upgrade everybody, which are cost effective. I think coaching is really important, but you can go beyond that

because essentially you want to create an emotional intelligence culture in an organization and that means reaching everybody.

**Jen:** The people that are below the top of the house now will become the leaders of the future.

**Dan:** Exactly.

**Jen:** So, you mentioned, especially with schools and children, you mentioned emotional and social intelligence. Can you talk about the difference between emotional and social intelligence? What is social intelligence? How is that different?

**Dan:** In my model, I actually put the two together. Some people see emotional intelligence as just having to do with self-leadership, self-awareness, and self-management and social intelligence is empathy, how to handle relationships. I see that as part and parcel of the same set of abilities. They're highly complementary, I would say.

**Jen:** Has your understanding evolved or changed over the years? What's changed, what have we learned recently about emotions? I guess I'm reflecting also a little bit on the pandemic and what we've all been living through. I feel like there's a lot of discussion on emotional intelligence, but also just our ability to practice and learn has been stunted somewhat, I think.

**Dan:** It's very interesting. I don't think emotions have changed in the last 50,000 years. I think that we really have the same structure of the brain and the same structure of the emotional centers and so on. I don't know that we've learned that much new in recent years about how all those systems operate. What has changed though is that we've been isolated, we've had lockdowns, we've had to work by remote teleconference, and this changes what matters about how we handle our emotions, particularly our negative emotions and also our empathy because there's a problem. This is actually a hardware problem with teleconferences. If you're face to face, you can have eye contact. If you're doing a teleconference, you can't. The reason is that when you look to camera, the person thinks you're looking in their eyes, but if you look at the person's face, you have to look off camera, on your screen, and that breaks the connection. So, eye contact is the fundamental way two brains connect in face-to-face direction. So, if you can't do that, I think it means you need to put more effort into empathy and there are many, many signals that come across in a teleconference that tell you what a person is feeling. Facial expression, tone of voice. Those are very huge carriers of emotional information and those two alone will help you empathize. You can't look a person in the eye, but you can see the person's face as they're speaking, and that helps you. What's really bad on a teleconference is that there's the temptation to look at your phone. I remember I was called in by a company, I can't say which, that makes a teleconference package that it sells to other companies and they had a problem with their own people using their own teleconference software, which was people would be looking at their phones instead of to the person who was talking, but of course, the person who's talking sees the person look away. In other words, what in poker you would call a tell, which is a small movement that indicates what's actually going on with you. The tells on a teleconference matter enormously because they send the message to the person if you're not fully attending that you don't care what they're saying. If you're the leader, if you're the most powerful person in that group on that call, it's particularly damaging because it says to everyone in the group the leader doesn't care about this person. So, it means that we have to be more careful about managing ourselves and being self-aware or as well as being empathic on Zoom or on any teleconference.

**Jen:** Yeah, I also have found, which I turn it off, the feature to look at yourself. I feel a lot of people are for me it was, I would get distracted by looking at myself and saying things like, 'Wow, do I look that tired? Do I look that old?' Do you become consumed with yourself, as opposed to looking at the other person and paying attention to what's going on with them?

**Dan:** Exactly. In a face to face, we usually don't have the mirror.

**Jen:** Exactly. You're not looking at yourself, which I always found to be a really interesting functionality. I haven't figured out the purpose of it exactly anyway. That's it.

**Dan:** I think it's good for a quick check beforehand.

**Jen:** Then turn it off.

**Dan:** Whatever. Then, turn it off and look at the person. I think that's the difference.

**Jen:** So, how is human resilience tied to emotional intelligence?

**Dan:** Resilience is part of emotional intelligence. Remember, self-management is one of the four parts and in my competency model, I talked about emotional balance, which means being able to handle disruptive emotions, but not...you know you want your positive feelings, of course you want to bring that to any interaction to work, but one of the abilities that's a metric for emotional balance is resilience operationally. Technically, we talk about resilience is the time it takes you to recover from the peak of upset back to your baseline calm, and we find that the more often and the longer someone practices a tool that will help them become more emotionally balanced like mindfulness for example, the quicker the recovery time becomes. In other words, they become more resilient. Resilience these days is I think more important than ever for the reasons you mentioned, Jen, which is that COVID and the economy and the uncertainties of the day make us triggered more often and upset more easily. So, the ability to recover from that upset has a premium that I think is greater than ever.

**Jen:** Yeah, I completely agree. So, let's get specific and talk about strategies or ways that we can build our own personal emotional intelligence. Do you have some go-to favorite strategies or what are some of the more common or popular ones, I guess? Where do you start when you want to build your emotional intelligence?

**Dan:** It depends what you need to build I would say. So, let me talk in general about what helps most people most of the time. As you know from coaching, you need to individualize this too. You need to tailor it to a particular person's needs, but one of the things that helps strengthen emotional intelligence across the board I mentioned briefly before, that's mindfulness because the capacity to shift your relationship to your feelings and thoughts, to see anger as something that's coming and going rather than catches you in its grip, for example, that's a very valuable lesson and mindfulness helps you with that. I just published a book with a friend of mine who's a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, Richard Davidson, where we reviewed all the major findings on mindfulness and meditation and it's very strange. Mindfulness, the main person in introducing mindfulness is a third friend of mine, Jon Kabat-Zinn. Oddly enough, Richard Davidson, we all call him Richie, and I and Jonny were friends in Cambridge in the 70s before anybody heard of any of us. We've all continued to be interested in this in one way or another. So, in the mindfulness scientific literature, what we found is that people become, as I said, more able to manage their upsetting emotions. They become more calm and more clear, and becoming

clear means that whatever your cognitive talents, whatever your abilities, you can express them too at peak because you are clear. It's our distractions. The biggest distraction, by the way, is emotional upset. That's what keeps us being us at our best. So, it helps you be calm and kind. Very often in mindfulness, there is a method called the Circle of Caring where you think about helping people who've helped you, and you're grateful for that and then people you love and you can help them, people you know, how you can help them and then you expand the circle. It turns out that that exercise makes people more caring and kind and compassionate, more likely to help someone in need. It turns out it also seems to strengthen the circuitry in the brain for doing just that. So, I would say that Jen, you asked for what can help emotional intelligence, and I would say mindfulness is one thing. The second thing that can help is feedback. This is where your spouse or your teenager or your trusted partner or colleague at work can help you by letting you know a) what you're pretty good at and b) what you could get better at. This, of course, is the essence of coaching, but not everyone can have a coach, but everybody can have a friend and someone you trust and someone who can be honest with you. Now, that's something very valuable.

**Jen:** So, I think we talked about emotionally intelligent organizations, are there things that team leaders particularly, I mean for us at Deloitte, a lot of where the rubber meets the road is on our teams, the people that we work with day in and day out as opposed to, yes, it's important to have top of the house emotionally intelligent leaders, but these team leaders that we engage with every day, are there things that team leaders can do to help build the emotional intelligence of their teams?

**Dan:** The best research on team's emotional intelligence is by Vanessa Druskat at the University of New Hampshire. She's studying teams for decades now and she finds that there's an emergent emotional intelligence at the team level, which predicts very well the effectiveness and performance of that team. The higher the collective emotional intelligence, the better the performance of the teams, which she finds across the board. This means that teams develop emotionally intelligent norms. For example, the equivalent of individual self-awareness is a self-aware team. It's a team where people know each other's strengths and weaknesses. It's also a team where they have the equivalent of emotional balance. They can manage their collective emotions very well. There's a very high sense of psychological safety, which is what Google found when they studied their high-performing teams. She calls it a sense of belonging. People feel safe and secure so they can name issues that are simmering and surface them and deal with them. They can say you know so and so would be better at this than this other person without hurting that other person's feelings, because they can be candid with each other because they trust each other. So, these are some of the qualities of emotional intelligent teams and the team leader can help in making explicit these norms. So, for example that idea, which is the innovative consultancy, if you interrupt someone, people will pelt you with stuffed animals. In way of letting you know you just broke the norm, which is because you should let someone finish what they're saying before you can interrupt.

**Jen:** I would love to know their version of that in a virtual world, but I like that idea a lot. So, is there such thing as full emotional mastery or is it just something we're all human, so we make mistakes and we just continue to develop throughout life or are there actually people that have full mastery of their emotions?

**Dan:** I've never met one and not sure they exist.

**Jen:** That's good to know for the rest of us.

**Dan:** Actually, I've spent a little bit of time over the years with the Dalai Lama. He may be the most intelligent person I encountered. However, most of us could use a little help here and there. There's a saying in Zen that all of us are perfect and we could use a little development too.

**Jen:** Yeah, I like that, continuous learning. So, when you make a mistake or when you do something that isn't emotionally intelligent, how do you handle that? How do you apologize? What are the strategies for reconciling with emotional intelligence when you make a mistake?

**Dan:** I think apologies are very powerful. What you're doing is acknowledging that you may have hurt that person's feelings, that you regret it, and that you want to start with a clean slate. Let's do over there. I think it's as simple as that.

**Jen:** Then, I guess my last question for you. You're a writer. So, I mean is writing a strategy? What role does writing play and self-reflection, self-awareness, and building emotional intelligence?

**Dan:** That's very interesting. I think that journaling can be very powerful, but I've never done it myself. People who do it say it's been very helpful. I do a newsletter. It's on LinkedIn. It's free. It's on emotional intelligence. That helps me stay current. I'm doing a book, which is about the emotionally intelligent organization and this helps me stay very current in my thinking and staying current with research, which is important too, but I think that research actually says that journaling can be a very powerful way to help you or us manage our emotions, reflect on our emotions, understand more deeply what's happening to us in our world. So, I think it's very powerful.

**Jen:** Got it. So, I lied. I actually have one more question that just popped in my head. So, if there's somebody in your life, perhaps at work or otherwise that is just completely lacking in all emotional intelligence, how can you help? How can you help them? What do you say other than saying you have no emotional intelligence whatsoever? How can you help that person see that they too need to practice and need help in this area?

**Dan:** Think about the power relationship you have with that person. Is it your spouse? Is it your child? Is it a coworker? Is it someone senior in your workplace? All of those suggest different kinds of diplomacy, but in general, you would never say you lack emotional intelligence I think, instead, you might tell them what they're good at and segue into what would help them if they would improve and if you're able to suggest some ways that they could get better at it, I think it will work.

**Jen:** It goes back to being kind.

**Dan:** Be kind and remember kind doesn't mean being nice. It means giving the person important information in a way they can hear. There's a wonderful series of books called, "Talking So Kids Will Listen and Listening So Kids Will Talk" and I think that principle applies to anyone.

**Jen:** I completely agree. Can you let the listeners know how they can follow you, how they can learn more from you and learn more about the work that you do on emotional intelligence?

**Dan:** Sure, there are several ways. One, is I have a podcast like this. It's called First Person Plural and it's on most podcast platforms. The second is if you want to go more deeply into the specifics of emotional intelligence, you can look at the Building Blocks of Emotional Intelligence. It's a series of primers on each competence, available from Key Step Media. If you're interested in building out emotional intelligence in your organization, I'm starting the Goleman Consulting Group to help with that. This is to get to people



who don't qualify, particularly for coaching, because that's top of the house, but to help get it into the organization more generally.

**Jen:** Dr. Goleman, thank you for being on the show. This was such a rich dialogue for me. I know the listeners will get so much out of your wisdom and everything. Thank you for everything that you've put out in the world that has helped so many people, including myself. It was a real honor to have you on the show.

**Dan:** Jen, it's been my pleasure. You had some great questions. Thanks again for having me.

**Jen:** I'm so grateful Dan could be with us today to talk about emotional intelligence. Thank you to our producers, Rivet360, and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on [deloitte.com](https://deloitte.com) or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell to hear more. If you like the show, don't forget to subscribe so you get all of our future episode. If you have a topic you would like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series or maybe a story you would like to share, please reach out to me on LinkedIn, my profile is under the name Jen Fisher, or on Twitter, [@jenfish23](https://twitter.com/jenfish23). We're always open to your recommendations and feedback. Of course, if you like what you hear, please share, post, and like this podcast. Thank you and be well.