

Three Quick Steps to Overcome Prejudice Using Emotional Intelligence

By Franky Johnson and Adele B. Lynn

Emotional intelligence is our ability to manage ourselves and your relationships with other people so you can live your intentions. If it is your intention to count yourself among those who are overcoming prejudice, then, these three steps will help. Emotional intelligence demands self-awareness and then using that self-awareness to change how we think, feel, and act.

1) Recognize

One of the hardest issues for most of us is to face the fact that prejudice or bias has seeped into our thinking. You have to examine your thoughts and your feelings. Pay particular attention to your thoughts about individuals. A great exercise is to finish the sentences...Blacks are... Hispanics are... Old people are... This activity will give you a good indication of the programmed thinking that your rational brain has adopted as “truth.” When you discover these ill-conceived “truths” in your thinking, you’re in a better position to confront them for what they are. Your feelings are also significant indicators that will help you confront prejudice. When you are in the presence of different groups or people, how do you feel? Condescending? Fearful? Superior? Dismissive? Defensive? Confused? Pay attention, because feelings often precede actions and behaviors. So, this step involves facing the truth about your prejudice.

2) Redirect

Having the courage to admit prejudice is a great first step. Now, call upon yourself to redirect both your thinking and your emotions when it comes to people of different color, national origin, religion, etc. To confront those ill-conceived “truths,” ask yourself to find contrary evidence to reframe your thinking and form new and more accurate truths. Keep challenging your thinking and introducing new information. One of the very best ways to redirect your thinking is to get to know people who are the target of your prejudice. Spending time and openly exchanging ideas often is the best way to get past the initial emotional reactions that may poison your thinking and your behaviors. Also, redirecting also means deciding that you intend to treat people differently than you currently do. Once that intention to treat people differently is in your consciousness, you should consider it every time you encounter someone who is the target of your prejudice.

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3) Reflect

An important path to any type of self-improvement is reflection. Each day, we have an opportunity to reflect on our interactions with others as well as our intended outcomes. Reflection is a powerful tool for overcoming prejudice IF we use it correctly. Too often, we spend valuable reflection time justifying our actions. We lament, "I didn't mean for Susie to feel hurt." We justify our actions by hanging onto our good intentions. Instead, if we use our reflection time to consider the result that our words or behaviors caused, we're in a much better position to redirect our behaviors in our next encounter. We're not measured on what we intended, we're measured on the impact, so that's what we should consider during reflection. What did we deliver? Yet, reflection isn't about regret. Each day presents a new opportunity to learn from our encounters and to try again. The biggest regret is to never face the truth and fail to confront your prejudice in the first place.

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