

# SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

A practical handbook for changemakers on  
the seven skills you need to survive and thrive

This handbook is produced by Pioneers Post in partnership with Social Enterprise Academy and Emerald Works.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Emerald Works is a UK-based provider of digital, on-demand, evidence-led career and management learning solutions. Our mission is to make a difference to people's lives, delivering the insights, resources, and solutions they need to overcome challenges for themselves and their organisations.



The Social Enterprise Academy believes social entrepreneurs play an essential role in changing the world. We strengthen their role in local communities through transformational learning that increases their community impact. Since 2004, we have facilitated over 83,000 social entrepreneurs of all ages to help create a fairer, more equitable world.

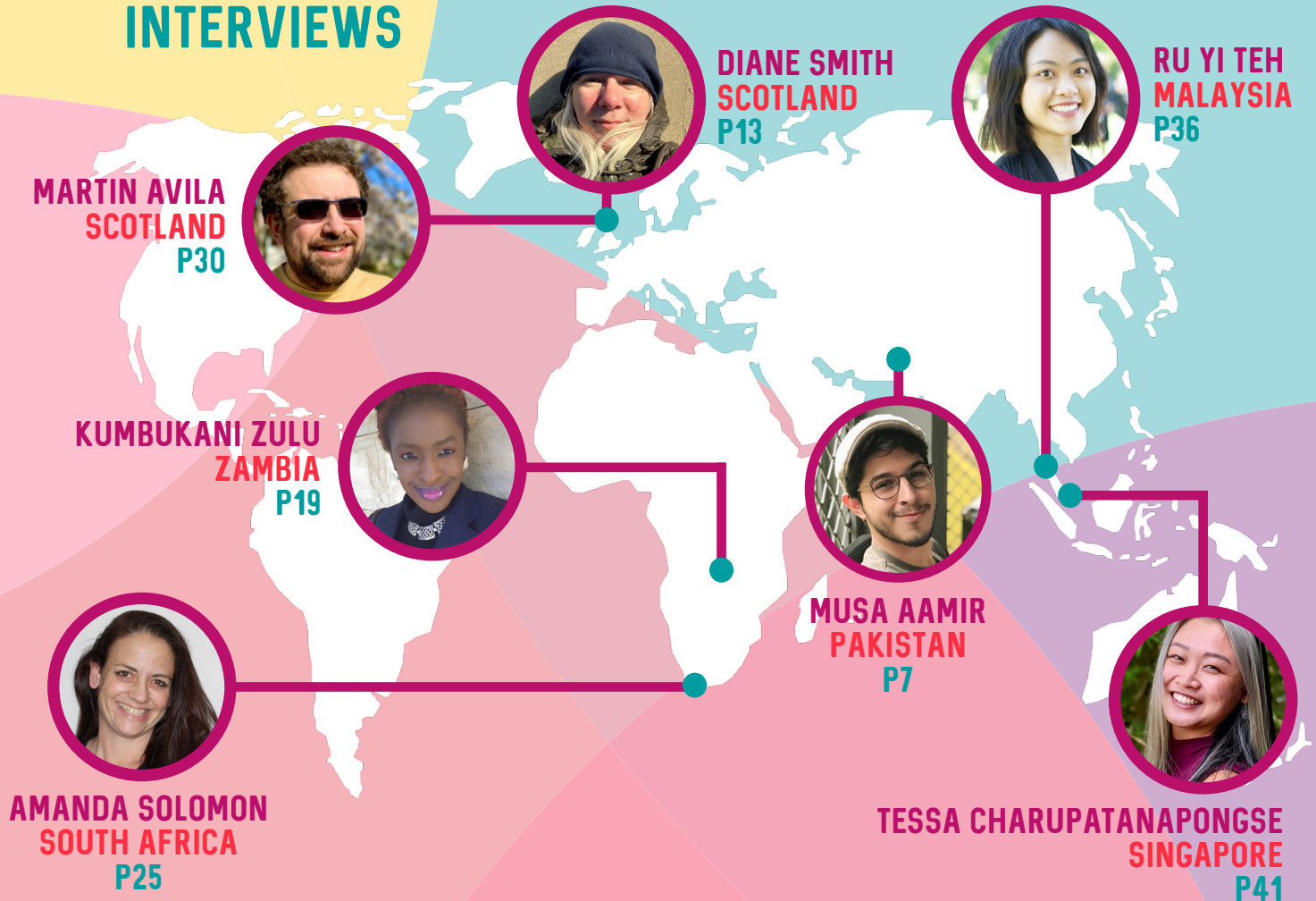


Pioneers Post is the independent news network for the global impact community. Over two decades, we have established ourselves as the essential source of intelligence and insight for pioneers across the impact economy, from social entrepreneurs and impact investors, to changemakers working across business, civil society, philanthropy, government and academia/research. As a social enterprise ourselves, our mission is to help other social entrepreneurs around the world to do good business, better.

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## INTERVIEWS



# HOW A 'NO REGRETS' SKILLSET CAN ARM SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson

*Experts have warned that half the world's employees will need to be reskilled by 2025. But with which skills? Emerald Works' Kevin Dunne and Social Enterprise Academy's Claire Wilson set out seven critical, "no regrets" skills that social enterprise leaders will need to flourish in the post-Covid-19 landscape. Drawing on expert guidance and insights from social entrepreneurs, they'll explore each one in depth and uncover how they punch their weight in the real world.*

Predicting the future feels futile, but there's one thing we do know: it's going to be different. Very different. We are dealing with what is commonly known as "the unknown unknowns".

However, what we can do is prepare ourselves, and our organisations, to be as ready as we can be for the post-Covid-19 landscape.

So, the focus of this handbook is on the essential, adaptable, enduring skills that will help keep us – the world, organisations, and individuals – on our feet. Whatever the terrain beneath them. A range of key, "no regret" skills that will be useful no matter how roles or organisations change. As the late US author and philosopher Eric Hoffer noted: "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

***In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists***  
– Eric Hoffer, author and philosopher

The challenge the world faces, as global management consultants McKinsey and Co. see it, is to "reskill and upskill the workforce to deliver new business models in the post-pandemic era".

Their answer lies in the development of a "no regrets" skill set, which McKinsey consultants [cast broadly as](#) "a talent strategy that develops employees' critical digital and cognitive capabilities, their social and emotional skills, and their adaptability and resilience". In other words, investing now before it's too late.

It's an issue already blinking on the radar of business leaders. Global professional services and accounting giant PwC [reported in 2020](#) last year that 74% of CEOs were concerned about the availability of key skills. Meanwhile, the World Economic Forum projected in its 2020 [Future of Jobs Report](#) that half of all employees around the world would need reskilling by 2025.

***Social entrepreneurs don't only need technical skills. They need skills applicable in any context***

Claire adds: "Social entrepreneurs don't only need technical skills. They need the skills that are useful and applicable in any context – helping us navigate, deal with, and respond to any of the challenges we face when working to make the world a better place."

Developing a "no regrets" skill set is, then, mission-critical.

## THE SEVEN SKILLS

### RESILIENCE

Ed Prideaux, a writer, characterises resilience in [How to heal the 'mass trauma' of Covid-19](#) as “the oil that churns our cognitive machine and keeps us moving in stress”. Resilience is our ability to adapt and bounce back when things don't go as planned.

### ADAPTABILITY

Executive coach and trainer Bruna Martinuzzi calls adaptability a central requirement for any future: “The ability to change (or be changed) to fit new circumstances is a crucial skill for leaders, and an important competency in emotional intelligence.”

### CREATIVITY

Using our imagination and developing the ability to visualise alternative solutions or states of being supports us to be more effective learners and workers in any role. In this case we mean technical not artistic creativity, using lateral thinking techniques like “brainstorming” or “random input”, or “programmed thinking” that relies on logical or structured ways of creating a new product or service.

### SELF-MANAGEMENT

An umbrella term that takes in self-mastery and overlaps with self-regulation, self-discipline, professionalism, and self-care, which in turn helps ensure health and wellbeing. Fully developed, we are able to control ourselves in all situations, and move forward consciously and steadily towards our goals.

### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise our emotions, understand what they're telling us, and realise how they affect people around us. It's also about picking up on other people's emotions, understanding them, not being fazed by them, and managing them.

People with high emotional intelligence are usually successful in most things they do. Why? Because they are who other people want on their team. Because they make others feel good, they go through life far more smoothly than people who are easily angered or upset.

### EMPATHY

According to leading British psychologist, Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, “Empathy is like a universal solvent. Any problem immersed in empathy becomes soluble.”

In its simplest form, empathy is the ability to recognise emotions in others, and to understand other people's perspectives in a situation. At its most developed, empathy delivers insights to improve someone else's mood and to support them through challenging situations.

### CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the discipline of rigorously and skilfully using information, experience, observation, and reasoning to guide decisions, actions, and beliefs.

An open mind, one that is willing and able to explore alternative approaches and experimental ideas, is vital.

In this series we share expert views, evidence-led solutions, practical tools and interviews with social enterprise leaders. We hope this allows you to reflect on how you can develop your own learning in each of the seven areas.

We begin the series with resilience, featuring Musa Aamir, the co-founder of [Rizq](#), a social enterprise in Pakistan that aims to end hunger by making providing food more convenient and minimising food waste.

“As Covid-19 hit, we were pretty down and dusted, but we kind of rose up out of the ashes,” recalls Musa.

Resilience was Musa's road back.

# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 1: RESILIENCE

Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson

*Resilience gives us the power to overcome problems. And even if you're not a naturally resilient person, you can learn to develop a resilient mindset and attitude. Read on to find out how to arm yourself with this critical skill.*

Failure, setbacks and disappointment are certainties in life. What matters, what makes the difference, is how we deal with them.

Nobody is born with an innate ability to cope effortlessly when things go wrong. We have to learn how to cope; we have to actively develop resilience.

First we have to be kind and compassionate with ourselves when storms blow into our lives. Try to keep a clear head, and recognise that few people can survive storms on their own. We must not be afraid to ask for support.

You can protect and grow your resilience by looking after your health and wellbeing, building your support network and changing your thinking from negative to positive.

Harnessed in this way, resilience gives us the power to overcome problems. Resilient people don't dwell on failures; they acknowledge the situation, learn from their mistakes, seek support and move forward.

A positive perception of new and difficult circumstances can help too. Perhaps *Little Women* author Louisa May Alcott put it best: "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship".

***I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship***  
- Louisa May Alcott, author

True resilience is also about being human, looking after yourself so you're in a good state to withstand the troubles that bubble up in every life. Yes, you will still sometimes fall, but will recover to fight another day. Even if it takes time.

Having a good support system will help too. You don't have to push yourself to the limit when you have people who you can rely on. Their support allows you to conserve your personal resources, so that you can stay calm and focused and make good decisions.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Resilient people see difficulties as an opportunity for growth, not as a negative reflection on their abilities. They are committed to their goals, and they have a compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning. They commit to their work, relationships, friendships, causes they care about and religious or spiritual beliefs.

They spend their time and energy focusing on situations and events they have control over, where they can have the most impact. They feel empowered and confident. People who worry about events beyond their control, on the other hand, often feel lost, helpless and powerless.

Psychologist Martin Seligman says the way that we explain setbacks to ourselves is also important.

People who are optimistic (and therefore have more resilience), he says, see the effects of bad events as temporary rather than permanent.

These people don't let setbacks affect other, unrelated, areas of their lives, either. They would say: "I'm not very good at this," rather than: "I'm no good at anything".

***Resilient people don't let setbacks affect other areas... they say: I'm not very good at this, rather than: I'm no good at anything***



Dr Cal Crow, co-founder of the Centre for Learning Connections, identified several further attributes common in resilient people:

- They have a positive image of the future. They maintain a positive outlook, and envision brighter days ahead.
- They have solid goals, and a desire to achieve them.
- They are empathetic and compassionate. However, they don't waste time worrying what others think of them. They maintain healthy relationships, but don't bow to peer pressure.

On the flip side of this, how do we know when our resilience is low? Clear signs would be binge-watching TV or scrolling endlessly on your phone – behaviours that point to someone zoning out from reality rather than facing it.

When our resilience is low, we are lethargic and unmotivated, which can put a strain on our relationships and leave us vulnerable to physical or mental illness.

Recovery in the aftermath of a crisis is key to preparing for the next one. You can be tempted to continue on the adrenaline high, but you need to acknowledge your feelings, to celebrate your “survival” and to calm down. Only then can you regroup, learn from the situation and nurture your growing resilience.



## “THE SECRET SAUCE IS ENABLING COMPASSION” – MUSA AAMIR

### INTERVIEW

Musa Aamir is the co-founder of [Rizq](#), a social enterprise in Pakistan that aims to end hunger by making it easier to provide food to those in need and by minimising food waste.

In 2020, Musa took part in Social Enterprise Academy's [Scotland: Pakistan Impact Link programme](#), which supported youth-led social enterprises in Pakistan to scale their innovative solutions to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Social Enterprise Academy facilitator Anne Martin spoke to him recently to discuss how resilience – in the form of connecting with the community, deep empathy for the problems

they faced and a determination to help solve those problems – played a crucial part in Rizq's response to the global crisis.

**Anne Martin:** So Musa, we're a year on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Can you tell us where you were at this time last year?

**Musa Aamir:** Last February we were gearing up for our fifth anniversary at Rizq – a big moment for us. We were banking on that event to capitalise on momentum, to gain more users and a lot more business opportunities.

Around that time, we had about two to three months left in us. As Covid-19 hit, we were pretty down and dusted, but we kind of rose up out of the ashes.

Right at the cusp of Covid-19, the issue of hunger came to the national forefront in Pakistan. As we had been shouting about the issue for years, we were uniquely positioned to help.

A few months into Covid, many people were being laid off and we were desperately trying to round up more people to help with distributing food through our technology platform. Our journey has definitely been a journey of resilience.

**As Covid-19 hit, we were pretty down and dusted, but we kind of rose up out of the ashes**

But also the resilience has come from the community – the people on the ground who are not sure where their next meal is going to come from and who are dealing with layoffs from work. Their resilience is something that really motivated us to move forward.

I have seen people hosting food banks and soup kitchens. During these times, they still chose to do that – to prioritise filling other people's stomachs. It shows you how much a person can do in these situations and I think that's a mark of a resilient human being and a resilient community at large.

**AM:** Resilient individuals and resilient communities that you've brought together as a team! There have been so many social enterprises forced into hibernation during Covid-19, but you've done the opposite. What do you think helped you?

**MA:** Coming from an academic background, for a long time I thought hunger was an economic issue. But behind all of that, it is

a human issue. Hunger is not a problem, it is an indicator and symptom of a challenge to our human values. The solution then is not a systemic solution, the solution is a human one.

So that's why we are mobilising human beings – compelling them to show their compassion. We realised that our trump card is the youth of Pakistan. If we are able to mobilise them and enable them to show their compassion, that is the real solution.

The secret sauce is enabling that compassion in others and yourself. My compassion has been enabled by seeing a whole host of people come to drop off food.

During the pandemic, it's a risk for people to leave their homes. Seeing that human spirit is really beautiful. And as long as the human social fabric is intact, I think that everything's going to be OK.

We also continuously updated our website and social media channels and ran a campaign called 'Compassion Versus Corona' to get the word out. We weren't afraid of getting more people on board.

I know sometimes it doesn't make sense when you don't have any financing, but there is an age-old wisdom in Pakistan: 'Whenever you break food, break food in two'. Then whenever you break food in two, you can break food in four. You should keep creating food from that single piece.

**AM: Musa, you're not frightened to share or ask for help. That, alongside your compassion, I think, allows you to see opportunities and take opportunities – a key component of resilience.**

**MA:** Exactly, because when you're not doing it for yourself, you have nothing to lose. When you're driven towards a cause, you automatically become braver. You get courage from unexpected places because you get help from unexpected places as well.

This collaborative approach had always been our motto, as very early on with Rizq, I realised that hunger is not just my problem and I cannot solve it alone.

***When you're driven towards a cause, you become braver. You get courage from unexpected places because you get help from unexpected places***

There isn't any competition – if I compete, I actually go against the principles of the company and against the principles of sustenance as well, because competition actually inhibits sustenance.

Another reason why we grew so much during Covid is because we weren't reluctant to accept people coming into the fold. In some areas of the world, there can be partners picking and choosing who they want to work with, but we were open-armed to everyone. We just said, 'We have this problem, we have so many people to feed, if you can play a part please come and join in.' That humbleness and welcoming approach has really catapulted us to reach more people in Pakistan.

**AM: Finally, you mentioned that young people's compassion is the key to a changing society. Is there any advice you'd give to young people to build their resilience and realise their vision?**

**MA:** What I say to a lot of students here is that you have to realise the inherent value a human being possesses. You have to give them the honour and dignity that is their right.

Unfortunately, this practice is becoming obsolete in our culture. When I was young, I always used to know whether our neighbour was hungry or not. As I grew up, I realised that connection and that social fabric that had been present within my own society had disintegrated. That is completely due to not being able to give the human being right next to you the value and compassion due to them.

Being brave enough to always give that compassion will be your success factor. Because when you are able to do that, you automatically create a charisma within yourself and a position for yourself in society, where people gravitate towards you. People start to acknowledge you and see you as a friend.

When that happens, that is the point where your social enterprise will kick off – you need to have people behind you to work together for a cause, you cannot do it alone.

It will definitely take time but when you mobilise people and they are ideologically aligned with you, that is the strength you need. You do not need to strengthen the business models, the investments or the technology. The strength you truly need is in the people.

Our community and the people around us are vital in helping build our resilience, but the key to becoming a highly resilient person starts with ourselves.



## 10 WAYS TO BUILD YOUR RESILIENCE

The good news is that even if you're not a naturally resilient person, you can learn to develop a resilient mindset and attitude. To do so, incorporate the following into your daily life:

### 1. LEARN TO RELAX.

When you take care of your mind and body, you cope more effectively with challenges in your life. Develop a good sleep routine, try out a new exercise or use physical relaxation techniques, like deep breathing or meditation.

### 2. PRACTISE THOUGHT AWARENESS.

Resilient people don't let negative thoughts derail their efforts. Instead, they practise positive thinking. This means listening to how you talk to yourself when something goes wrong. If you find yourself making statements that are permanent, pervasive or personalised, correct these thoughts in your mind.

### 3. EDIT YOUR OUTLOOK.

Practise [cognitive restructuring](#), the therapeutic techniques that help people notice and change their negative thinking patterns.

### 4. LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES AND FAILURES.

Every mistake has the power to teach you, so look for the lesson in every situation. Also, ensure that you understand the idea of "post-traumatic growth". People often find that crisis situations allow them to re-evaluate their lives and make positive changes.

### 5. CHOOSE YOUR RESPONSE.

We all experience bad days but we have a choice in how we respond. We can react with panic and negativity, or remain calm and logical to find a solution. Your reaction is always up to you.

### 6. MAINTAIN PERSPECTIVE.

Resilient people understand that although a situation may seem overwhelming in the moment, it may not have that much of an impact in the long-term. So try to avoid blowing events out of proportion.

### 7. SET YOURSELF SOME GOALS.

If you don't already, learn to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) effective personal goals that match your values.

### 8. BUILD YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE.

Resilient people are always confident they will succeed eventually, despite the setbacks or stresses that they might be facing. This self-belief also enables them to take risks. When you develop confidence and a strong sense of self, you have the strength to keep moving forward, and to take the risks you need to get ahead.

### 9. DEVELOP STRONG RELATIONSHIPS.

People who have strong connections at work are more resistant to stress, and they're happier in their role. This also goes for your personal life. The more real friendships you develop, the more resilient you're going to be – because you have a strong support network to fall back on. (Remember that treating people with compassion and empathy is very important here.)

### 10. BE FLEXIBLE.

Resilient people understand things change, and that carefully-made plans may, occasionally, need to be amended or scrapped.



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[Elvis and Kresse co-founder on resilience](#)

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[Five tips for toughing out the challenges of team leadership](#)

## RESILIENCE CIRCLE: HOW RESILIENT ARE YOU?

Below are six key areas for building personal resilience. This is a reflective activity that you can do on your own or speak through with a colleague or friend. It will help you assess the different areas of personal resilience and make a plan to help strengthen it.

### STEP 1:

For each of the resilience factors, mark on the chart below how strong you currently feel in this area, on a scale of 1-5 (1 = this is something I feel I'm missing > 5 = this is an area of strength and reliability). Try to think of specific examples of when you've felt good in each area and think about why you are scoring each area the number you are.

### STEP 2:

Join each of the dots to build a network diagram of your personal resilience. How does your diagram look on balance? Are there some areas you're stronger in than others? Can you take anything from areas of strength to help build on other areas?

### STEP 3:

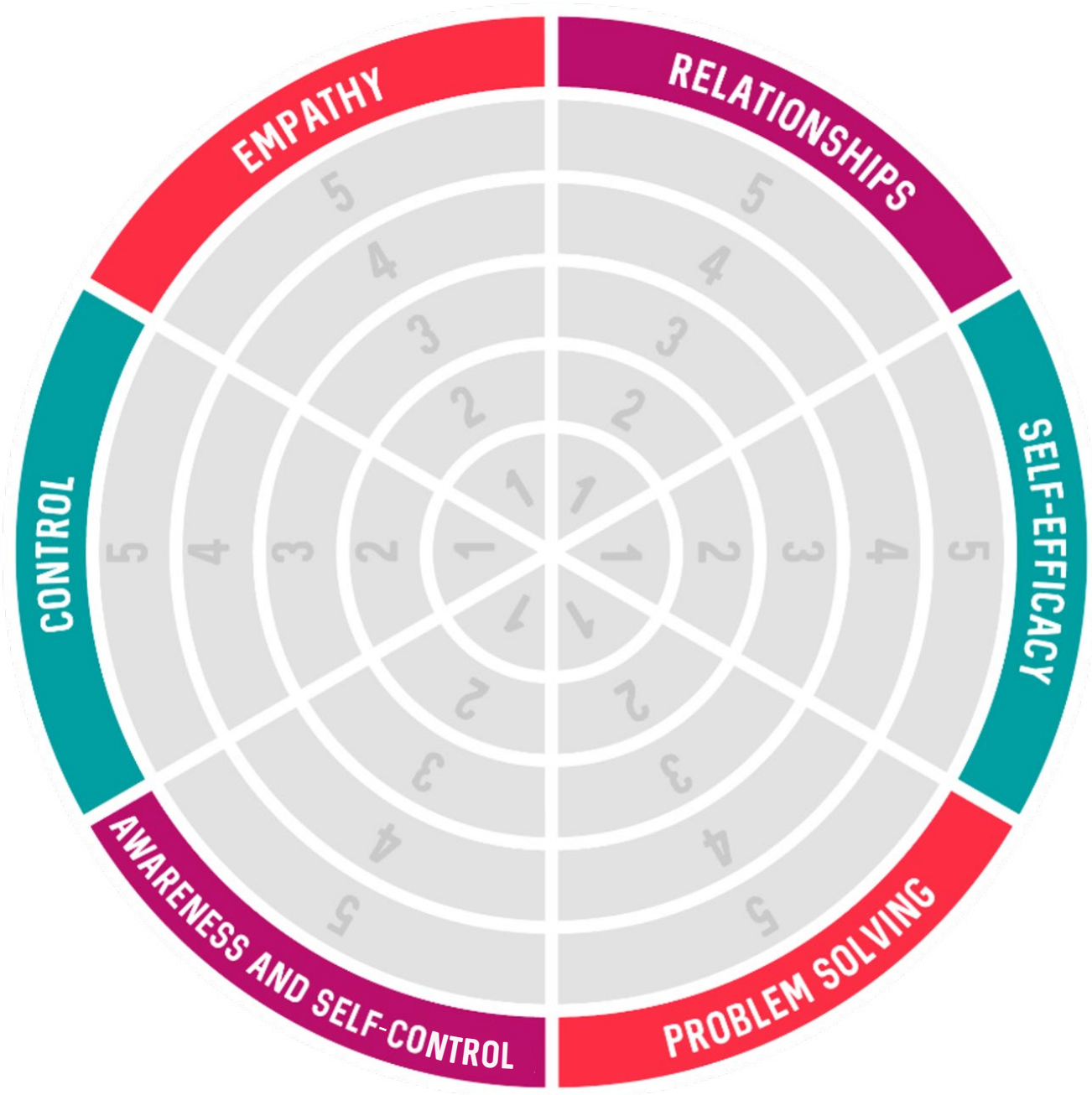
Choose one area you'd like to focus on and commit to one action to start building your resilience in that area. If you feel comfortable, share the action with someone – even better if they can support you in making it happen!

### STEP 4:

Make a regular routine of checking in on your resilience across each of the areas. You may notice that how you score the different areas changes quite a bit each time – that's natural as our resilience changes in different situations. Try to notice any patterns and make a plan to build on any positive steps or break a habit that's not serving you well. Try to explore why your scores might change – is there a specific trigger? Is there something that helps boost a score?

The more you can become aware of your personal resilience factors and notice how you feel in relation to them, it's easier to make a focused plan to help bounce back when we experience any setbacks.

Relationships	Self-efficacy	Problem solving
The capacity to build relationships and have some “go-to support” people in your life.	Belief in your own ability to tackle challenges, stretch yourself and take risks and achieve goals.	Ability to keep challenges in perspective, look at the bigger picture and detach from the “drama”.
Awareness and self-control	Control	Empathy
Knowing yourself and how different situations affect you and how you affect others.	The belief that you are in charge and can affect the outcome, staying positive and focused.	Ability to relate to others and put yourself in their shoes.



# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 2: ADAPTABILITY

*Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson*

*When things change suddenly, do you lean towards 'escape coping' or 'control coping'? Are you an adapter or an innovator? Explore ways to develop your adaptability – and set appropriate boundaries – as a social entrepreneur.*

Adaptability has always been key to our survival — as a species, as organisations and in our working and personal lives.

Now we must adapt to a world that has undergone a severe shock in the form of Covid-19. The choice we face is to sail on the wave of change sweeping in, or to get left behind on the shore.

Which is where adaptability comes in. It's being open to new ideas and situations. It's rooted in continual learning, curiosity and innovation. As an individual, as a business or as an organisation.

Being adaptable means being flexible under rapidly changing external conditions. When you're flexible, you're versatile, resilient and responsive to change. You can adapt to unexpected demands in the workplace or to an unpredictable event.

On the other hand, being rigid, unresponsive to change, or unwilling to adopt new ways undermines our ability to succeed in the long run.

***When you're flexible, you're versatile, resilient and responsive to change***

Learning how to manage stress is also an important part of becoming more adaptable. When you're relaxed, you're able to withstand setbacks and focus more clearly. Keeping stress in check starts with how you look after yourself. Get a good night's sleep, try to keep to a routine and exercise regularly.

## COPING WITH CHANGE

At its core, adaptability means coping with change – and people tend to cope with change in one of two ways: escape or control.

**Escape coping** is based on avoidance. You take deliberate actions to avoid the difficulties caused by the change. **Control coping** is positive and proactive. You gather support, and do whatever you can to be part of the new normal.

Most of us respond to major change with a mixture of the two. The key is to make a commitment to move forwards. But what you mustn't allow is that others take advantage of your adaptability. That's why it's vital to manage your boundaries.

Many people struggle to establish boundaries, held back by low self-esteem, a dread of upsetting people or a fear of conflict.

***When we find the balance between pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone but not into panic zone, we learn and grow***

But those who set strong personal boundaries empower themselves to exercise greater choice. They have a more robust sense of psychological safety and are generally happier and healthier. The key is to be assertive about your own boundaries, while considering those of others.

Some people may have an **immunity to change**: they consciously want to change and even outwardly agree to do so, but have an equally strong internal desire not to.

According to Dr Robert Kegan and Dr Lisa Laskow Lahey, immunity to change stems from deep-rooted assumptions and conflicting commitments. These internal barriers may be so entrenched that they are unconscious.

Of course, adaptability can be developed by anyone and applied in many situations, not just at moments of major change.

The Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory is a tool that measures how people solve problems and make decisions. Broadly speaking, **adapters** prefer a more methodical and organised approach. **Innovators** seek solutions by thinking outside of the box. One looks to do things better, the other differently. Both can be equally effective.

Harnessing **team players** and seeing the value in **collaboration** are further approaches that can also help organisations adapt to change.

When we embrace change, we intentionally put ourselves outside of our comfort zone. When we find the balance between pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone but not into panic zone, we learn, adapt and grow.



**“I QUICKLY REALISED THIS WAS AN OPPORTUNITY” – DIANE SMITH**

#### INTERVIEW

Diane Smith is a project manager at [Moray Way Association](#), which promotes the Moray Way walking route in the Scottish Highlands, coordinates the [Moray Walking & Outdoor Festival](#), and provides outdoor activities and education.

In 2020, Diane took part in the [Communities Leading in Tourism programme](#). She reconnects with programme facilitator James Hilder to discuss the topic of adaptability.

**James Hilder:** Diane, thinking about last year, what changed for you personally and for the organisation when the pandemic started?

**Diane Smith:** I was really worried in the beginning, even two weeks before the national lockdown. I actually remember crying just because I was worried about my family – and being type one diabetic, I wasn’t sure what was going to happen.

But I’ve always wanted the world to slow down so I could catch up, and I quickly realised this was an opportunity to do that. While I thought I would just be catching up on things, I actually really took time for myself and to think about what I wanted to do.

For the organisation, one of the things we learned was to be very quick and clear about information and get it out there as soon as possible. I think we actually sent out information on 19 March to audiences, event providers and volunteers to say we were going to cancel the walking festival for 2020.

**JH:** Obviously festivals up and down the country have been hit hard by Covid-19. What other ways did you adapt in terms of what you delivered last year?

**DS:** We had a project with Moray Council which was creating a very user-friendly digital library of all 150 walks on their Moray Ways website, so people would be able to quickly find a route if they were looking for a health walk or a challenging walk.

Because there was no festival, we [had the time to] quickly set this up. We also had volunteers go out and update the routes using GPS tracks so people could download the routes to their phone.

**JH:** It sounds like you pivoted quite quickly, not only in terms of sharing information but using that time to make sure the digital offer was up-to-date and partnering with the local authority to do that. Have you been able to access funds during Covid-19? Or was your organisation one that battered down the hatches waiting for better days?

**DS:** All of the above! We have gone into a financial agreement with Moray Council to set up the new site and maintain it. But we are also looking for funds to train more volunteers on how to take GPS tracks.

Towards Christmas time, Gil Martin from the [Drovers’ Tryst Walking Festival](#) in Perthshire contacted me. And after a conversation with him, we realised we had the potential to help each other and have a bit of peer learning.

So we quickly set up a Zoom summit of the Scottish walking festivals online. We’ve had three meetings since Christmas and are really looking at how we can help each other with things like reciprocal promotion, which has been really successful so far. Also looking at how we can link with national campaigns, marketing, how we can raise funds to support with training or insurance, and how we can evaluate how much impact we are having within the community.

If I was in any other organisation, we wouldn’t be sharing who we get our insurance from or how we market our events. But because we’re all social enterprises or community-led organisations, and maybe because of Covid



too, we have been sharing all of that information to the point where we're thinking of even doing a joint insurance. I can't think of any other sector that would share that much information.

**JH:** Were there any other changes you had to make in terms of how you worked? I know some people definitely struggled with change and others seemed to go 'well, let's go for it!' – which seems like what you've done.

**DS:** At the beginning of this year, we were thinking of not running a festival and I was having a real issue about what to do next.

[But] there's been a massive generation of ideas, probably because we had to slow down. People have been thinking about how we can make our user experience better on the Moray Way. In fact, one of our committee members has written a draft version of a companion book for the walk, something we can make downloadable.

**There's been a massive generation of ideas, probably because we had to slow down**

I'm quite keen on the idea of a digital walking passport – on many of the long-distance walks you have a little paper passport that you can get stamped. With a digital passport, we can find out who exactly is walking the way and start building up a relationship with these people. Many people who walk the way, we never know who they are or exactly how many people do it.

**JH:** You aren't the first organisation I've come across that has decided to use the time to reflect and regroup. Is that something that you felt comfortable with? Would you say you're quite an adaptable person?

**DS:** I suppose I am, once I get over the shock of something – I'm probably the person who does the fire-fighting. I suppose what I've done is been the communicator to keep people together.

One of the members on the committee had Covid and has long-term effects. That's been quite worrying – she is also one of the more active people who leads the walks and our festival. So [part of our role is] adapting so that she can go at her own pace as well. She's been the one coming up with ideas of walks that don't necessarily need to have someone leading them, but letting people go at their own pace using [geocaching](#) routes.

**JH:** Reflecting on the past year, what would you do differently?

**DS:** It's interesting because I've been speaking to other people and organisations and no one, six months after the initial lockdown, sat down and



Above: hikers on the 'Ghost Towns of Strathavon' walk, along the Moray Way in Scotland

said 'OK, what have we learned?', because we were always in a continual change.

There was never a period to stop, look back and learn for the future. But now we can, and we are doing that more. If we had to do this again, I think we would have taken a step back and looked at our values, mission and vision at the start and then we might have been more productive during Covid in terms of clarity on the direction we wanted to take.

## SIX WAYS TO DEVELOP YOUR ADAPTABILITY

In her book, *The Leader as a Mensch: Become the Kind of Person Others Want to Follow*, educator, author and speaker Bruna Martinuzzi highlights six key ways to develop adaptability.

1. When you catch yourself shooting an idea down, take a moment to consider what mental scripts are influencing your behavior. **Mental scripts** are so automatic that you must decide intentionally that you want to challenge them.
2. Help your people distinguish between **observation and inference**, between **fact and conjecture**. Inference and conjecture can be influenced by mental scripts which don't have a bearing on reality. Be the voice in the room that calls others' attention to this possibility.
3. Do you habitually insist on going '**by the book**'? What would happen if you applied standard procedures more flexibly?

***If you left tomorrow, what would your successor do to improve things? Consider making these changes yourself***

4. Are you **trading on old knowledge**? Do you need to update your skills? Are you relying too much on your title as the sign of authority? We need to adapt by continually evolving and reinventing ourselves.

5. When we hold a position for some time, we may become **accustomed to the status quo** and fail to challenge it. It must be challenged for continued growth to occur. If you left tomorrow, what would your successor do to improve things? Consider making these changes yourself.

6. The Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory measures the way people solve problems and make decisions. **Adapters** prefer a more methodical and organised approach to problem-solving, and are more likely to seek a solution by working within a current framework. **Innovators** prefer a less orderly, more unconventional approach and are likely to seek solutions by thinking outside of the box. One looks to do things better, the other differently. If you want to know where your team is in this dimension, see the [Kirton Adaptation-Innovation Inventory](#).



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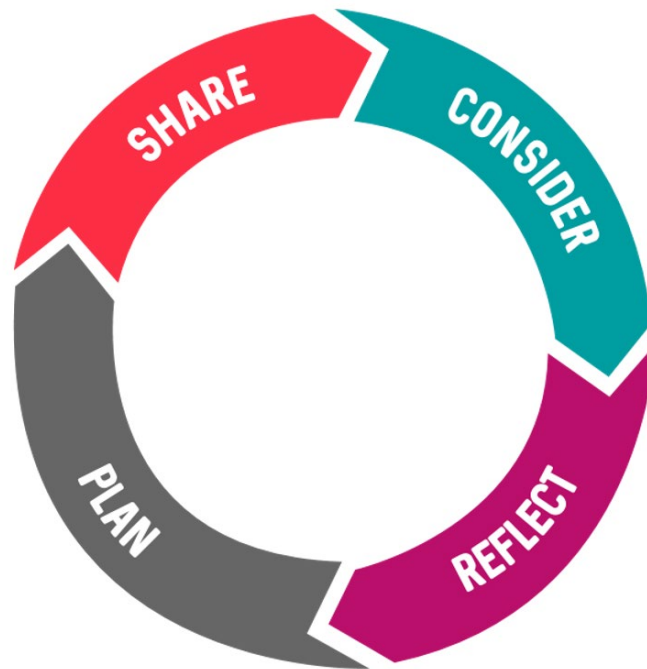




# ADAPTABILITY SIMULATOR: HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

Below are four scenarios which could impact an organisation. Imagine you were faced with each and consider how you would respond.

Try and notice your gut reaction, and then use the reflection questions below to help with your understanding.



## STEP 1: CONSIDER

**What would you do if...**

1. Your main funder changes the requirements of their grants?
2. There is a shortage of a core component of your product which will mean you can no longer meet customer demand for the next 2 months?
3. A new technology enters the market which competes with your product/service?
4. A volunteer who you've relied on for a long time decides to leave?

## STEP 2: REFLECT

**Think about how you responded to each scenario:**

- What kind of thoughts went through your mind? How open to change were you? Did you feel threatened, frustrated or disappointed? Or did you see it as an opportunity? Did you come up with an alternative plan?
- Why do you think you responded the way you did?
- Think about past experiences when things have changed. How have you responded then?
- Were your responses common across all of the scenarios?
- What do your responses suggest about your adaptability?

## STEP 3: PLAN

Consider the *Six ways to develop your adaptability resource* and your responses above.

- What action could you take this week to strengthen your adaptability?
- What thoughts or feelings might indicate that you're resisting change? What will you do if you notice this in future?
- How will you hold yourself accountable to trying new approaches or ways of doing something going forward?
- How could you support others with their adaptability?

## STEP 4: SHARE

- **Ask others in your team** how they would respond in each of the scenarios.
- **Notice any similarities or differences** and have a discussion about why you responded the way you did.
- **Consider what this is telling you about the culture of adaptability** and innovation in your organisation. Is this an area of strength or something you might need to develop? What actions can you take together to continue building adaptability?

# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 3: CREATIVITY

Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson

*Creativity leads to success – and it is a process that you can practise and develop.  
Explore our expert guide to creativity for social entrepreneurs  
– featuring six key strategies and an activity.*

When it comes to ideas, we all have them – but most of us probably don't see ourselves as creative. That's the realm of writing Hollywood blockbusters or number one records, surely?

And that would be true of artistic creativity, the kind born of skill, technique and self-expression. But technical creativity, where you create new theories, technologies or ideas, is something that everyone can develop.

Some people are, of course, more confident or naturally gifted when it comes to creativity. But anyone can be creative – given the time, tools, support, systems and the right mental outlook.

So, while creativity **can** involve inspiration out of the blue, it's more about a process and a habit you can practise and develop – individually and as an organisation.

Technical creativity is key to organisational and personal success. It drives innovation, efficiency, problem solving, business competitiveness and job satisfaction to name but a few.

There are two main strands to technical creativity: **programmed thinking** and **lateral thinking**.

Programmed thinking relies on logical or structured ways of creating a new product or service. Examples of this approach are [Morphological Analysis](#) and the Reframing Matrix.

Developed and popularised by Edward de Bono, lateral thinking includes approaches like Brainstorming or Random Input.

Lateral thinking recognises that our brains are pattern recognition systems. We instantly recognise patterns such as faces, language and handwriting. Without pattern recognition, we would starve or be eaten. We could not cross the road safely.

Unfortunately, we get stuck in our patterns. Solutions we develop are based on previous solutions to similar problems. Lateral thinking helps us to break out of this patterned way of thinking, to come up with brilliant, original solutions to problems.

The logical, disciplined thinking of programmed thinking is enormously effective in making products and services better. But it can only go so far before all practical improvements have been implemented.

**Often the only difference between creative and 'uncreative' people is self-perception**

A number of techniques fuse the strengths of the two different strands of creativity, such as the [Concept Fan](#) and Min Basadur's [Simplex model](#).

Often the only difference between creative and 'uncreative' people is self-perception. Creative people see themselves as creative and give themselves the freedom to create. Uncreative people do not.

But being creative may just be a matter of taking a step back and asking yourself, "Is there a better way of doing something?"

And as a leader, by encouraging creative thinking, you can help your people to become more engaged in what they do, increase their self-confidence and improve their morale.



## HOW LEADERS CAN ENCOURAGE CREATIVE THINKING

There are several ways to do this. First, identify and eliminate common barriers to creative thinking, such as **groupthink**, where dominant parties can stifle creativity, or a fear of failure.

Next, encourage your team to think creatively. Build trust, so that your people feel safe to express their ideas, don't penalise failures or bad ideas, and lead by example.

The more time you spend fostering a sense of safety and encouragement within your team, the more creative thinking you'll start to see.

Of course, creativity also needs to be translated into something with impact in the real world. Ideas must be evaluated, improved, polished and marketed before they have any value.

The easiest way to turn ideas into reality is to create a **reverse plan**. When you start at the beginning, there are many directions you can take to reach your end goal, so it's easy to get lost. When you start with your end goal and work backward, things tend to come together much more easily.

By creating a plan, asking for feedback and taking action, your great idea can become a reality.



**“I WANT TO EMPOWER SUCH WOMEN AND LET THEM SEE IT'S NOT TOO LATE”  
– KUMBUKANI ZULU**

### INTERVIEW

Kumbukani Zulu is the founder of [Kani K Fashions](#), a social enterprise in Zambia that specialises in mixed-media handmade jewellery. And, since last year, it has delivered jewellery-making classes to empower local women and young people.

In 2020, Kumbukani took part in the [Start Your Creative Enterprise programme](#), which supported creatives in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique to transform their talent into a sustainable social enterprise.

Below, she reconnects with Social Enterprise Academy Facilitator, [Chembo Litana](#), to discuss creativity.

**Chembo Litana:** So Kumbukani, we met on the Start Your Creative Enterprise programme in person just before the pandemic started. What has happened to Kani K Fashions since then?

**Kumbukani Zulu:** Covid-19 came as a surprise. We were making short-term and long-term plans and everything was put on hold. I had just opened a new store which was only about two months old and I was trying to build that. I had to close the business and work from home.

But with a jewellery brand, which might not be a daily necessity for everyone, people needed to choose whether they wanted a piece of jewellery or a piece of chicken. I remember not being able to pay rent, deciding to shut down and moving back to the countryside and just waiting for everything to pass.

The interesting thing is that during the learning programme we were being asked, 'What value do you offer to society?'. It was amazing that even after closing the business, people would still get in touch and say, 'Please work on this piece, my wedding is coming up!'. As challenging as it was, I still worked, of course with limitations. It's just now in May 2021 that I'm trying to build up. The business did go bankrupt but slowly I'm beginning to get back on my feet.

**CL:** As a talented and recognised jewellery designer, how have you creatively integrated the idea of having social impact into your business idea? How are you combining the two?

**KZ:** You might get awards, but if you don't get awards from your neighbour then you're not as valuable as you think. What is it that you're doing for the people around you? What are you giving back to the community for so much that they've given to you?

So last year I decided to start jewellery-making classes. I thought, 'What about the low-income people?'. The people who have the passion, but don't have equal access to information or to the tools that they need to bring their creativity to life. So I have been working towards that – how can we generate the resources to start offering classes to low-income people, especially women and young people who are disadvantaged?

In Africa, we still have women being considered only useful at home. At Kani K Fashions, I want to empower such women and let them see it's not too late – they still have time. While they

can attend to their roles in society, they can also attend to their personal development goals in contributing to the community as human beings with equal rights.

I want to become competent enough to raise awareness of equal access to precious metals and stones. We have people in rural areas who are crafting jewellery but they can't access the metals easily. Because there is this whole system that has been exploited by people who don't even belong to this country. We do appreciate international investment because we know it's an important aspect of growing the economy, but we also want to see local people benefiting from their own resources. But how do they benefit if they don't even know that they have those resources? How do they benefit when they don't even know how to use those resources [and transform] a raw material to the end product?

I'd like to establish an academy that offers jewellery and crafts training, especially to women and young people who wish to improve their economic status and turn their creativity into an enterprise.

**CL:** Wow. That is very inspiring! Of course I'd encourage you to keep pressing forwards. Is there anything else that you've done during Covid-19 to cultivate your creativity?

**KZ:** I've actually written my first e-book called 'Starting with the Basics'. I'm going to publish more editions. The series will help people to perfect their skills and learn from Kani K Fashions.

Because of Covid-19 I wasn't working much [on the business], but I have been working on myself so that I can be of help to others. If I am limited in my knowledge of jewellery, I won't be able to offer much.

Also I decided to take my time indoors to really grow my skills on partnerships for the future, because I know that Covid-19 is not here to stay. It's going to pass and when it passes, what is the value we're going to get out of it? The value that I have from staying home is that I did more partnerships. I got an invitation to be a member of the Jewellery Association of Zambia which was very big for me. That opened up an opportunity for mentorship with one of the biggest jewellery companies in Zambia.

**CL:** One of the things we looked at on the programme was different types of [leadership styles](#). You have mentioned previously that your natural style was more 'pace-setting' – what impact do you think this has had on creativity at your organisation?

**KZ:** Naturally I'm a very outspoken person. I always want to come into the room with that positivity – 'Look at what we have achieved!'. While

I am a pace-setter, we might have people who are visionaries, we might have people who are democratic or coaching types of leaders. How do we work together to achieve [our goals]?

If I am working with people, I make them realise that I value them as much as they value me. That I feel that the skills they have are important to help us progress.

While people will offer their skills and say, 'This is what I have', I will always ask, 'Are you sure this is all you have? Can you do more? I believe in you and I know that you can do more'. Some people just don't know what they are capable of doing.

Even before the programme, I thought that my boundaries had already reached their ends but if I just put in the effort and learn from others, I can do more. As much as I am a pace-setter, I also love to learn from others and hear what their ideas are and how we can move forward from there."

## SIX STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY

### 1. Avoid micromanagement

Micromanagement can be a major inhibitor of creative thinking. As a leader, give your people the space and freedom to think creatively, and to work and excel independently.

### 2. Build trust

The relationship between you and your team should be one built on trust. Without trust and mutual respect, creative thinking cannot occur.

Creative thinking involves a certain amount of risk, and people don't take risks with those they don't trust. You can help create a sense of safety by reminding your team often how important creative thinking is to you and your organisation.

### 3. Don't penalise failures

Many people resist expressing their creative ideas – and especially acting on them – because they're afraid of failure. Or they might be afraid that they'll be penalised if their idea doesn't work.

As a leader, it's important to help your team [overcome this fear of failure](#), and to recognise that good things can come from it. Many failures hide important lessons and insights that, when taken to heart, can lead to greater successes down the road.

### 4. Use effective brainstorming techniques

[Brainstorming](#) is a popular and effective

technique for generating ideas. However, many of the barriers that inhibit creativity, such as groupthink, deference to authority and shyness, crop up during brainstorming sessions. This is why it's often more effective to use variants of brainstorming than it is to use brainstorming itself.

For instance, if you have a member of your team who tends to drown out everyone else's ideas, then use techniques like [Round-Robin Brainstorming](#). This takes the form of everyone writing down an idea and passing it to their neighbour. The neighbour then comes up with an idea or improvement related to the original. Each card is circulated to everyone in the team. In this way, everyone's idea is fully explored by everyone else – and everyone in the group has an equal chance to contribute.

### 5. Lead by example

Encourage your people to think more creatively by [leading by example](#). Come up with your own creative ideas and don't be afraid to take risks.

And stick up for team members whenever they have an unusual idea that takes them or the team out of their comfort zones. The more you demonstrate your own creative thinking, the more your team will feel safe enough to follow suit.

### 6. Encourage solitude

Sometimes, people may find it easier to come up with creative ideas working alone. Whenever you can, encourage them to take time to explore new ideas. If possible, allow everyone time to pursue projects they feel passionate about.

Also, consider setting aside a specific physical space and providing the tools and resources your people need to pursue these ideas. This sense of freedom and empowerment can go a long way toward fostering a sense of creativity and excitement within your team.



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[A special kind of CEO at impact venture  
Willicroft: Mother Nature](#)

#### WATCH:

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makes greener choices fun](#)





# ADAPTABILITY SIMULATOR: HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

This exercise is designed to help generate some ideas and thoughts using different “lenses” or perspectives which can help in thinking creatively and widen our approach. It can be done individually or with a group.

## STEP 1: DEFINE

Think about something you would like to generate ideas about. Articulate this as a ‘How might I/we...’ statement e.g. *“How might we attract more women to our project?”*, *“How might I get in front of more investors?”*

## STEP 2: IDEATION ACTIVITY

This activity can be done individually or in small groups. Set a time limit – we suggest 5-10 minutes.

*The focus is on quantity, not quality!* At this point it’s not about developing a workable solution, but rather generating a broad range of ideas and thinking outside your usual sphere.

**Write down some ideas that...**

Sound totally outrageous and unworkable	A 5-year-old child might come up with	You would come up with if you knew you could never fail
Require no budget to implement or develop	Would require a partner organisation to work with you to develop and/or implement	Are quite sensible and pragmatic
An elderly person might suggest or come up with	Use all the assets you have in your organisation	Make you laugh and feel joyful
You have “borrowed” from other organisations	You could implement next week	Require a huge budget to implement or develop
The businesses in your area might be interested in purchasing or using	Your clients or beneficiaries might come up with to address their issues and challenges	Could take six months to develop

## STEP 3: REVIEW

Once the time is up, stop and review the ideas that have been generated. Are there any patterns in any of the ideas? Are there any ideas that you could take parts of, combine with others or add to for it to become a workable solution? Try to identify two or three ideas that could be refined and developed further.

## STEP 4: REFLECTION

To keep developing our creative and lateral thinking, it's helpful to reflect on our current attitude and response to creative thinking.

Think about your own experience:

- How did you feel doing that activity?
- What helped you to get creative?
- What do you think helps and hinders your creativity?

Now think about creativity in your organisation:

- How are new ideas usually generated? Where do they come from?
- How are new ideas and creative thinking generally received/treated in the organisation?
- What are the challenges?

## STEP 5: ACTION PLANNING

- What actions can you take to encourage more creativity, either personally or in your team?
- What one thing could you do this week to practise creative thinking?
- How could you build this in to your regular routine?
- How will you respond next time someone suggests a new idea? Recognise the creative thinking or dismiss it? Become aware of the culture of creative thinking around you and try to identify opportunities to support, encourage and nurture it.



# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 4: SELF-MANAGEMENT

Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson

*Self-management helps you become the best “you”: hone this crucial skill and you’ll earn trust, stay focused on your goals and look after yourself, too. Discover what self-management actually means and how you can develop it – plus eight steps towards self-discipline and an activity.*

Think of a great manager you’ve worked for or heard about – what were their qualities, how did they behave, what was it like working for them?

Now imagine having that kind of productive, positive and healthy relationship – or something even better – with yourself!

Through self-management, you could become the best “you” that you can be...

The best you overcomes obstacles, ignores distractions to get things done and moves forward.

The best you looks after yourself, takes time to understand others and earns their trust. The best you realises your potential – the fruit of self-management.

Fully developed, it enables us to control ourselves in all situations, and move forward consciously and steadily towards our goals.

**Self-management enables us to control ourselves in all situations, and move steadily towards our goals**

## MANY WAYS TO MANAGE

Self-management is an umbrella term that embraces self-mastery, self-discipline, self-regulation, professionalism and self-care.

Perhaps the best way to think about **self-mastery** is to consider someone who hasn’t got it. They’re probably impulsive. They might yell at colleagues. They’re unpredictable and seen as untrustworthy. Self-mastery means managing your emotions, impulses and actions. It means you know your purpose, and have the self-discipline needed to do things in a deliberate, focused and honourable way.

Four areas of your life to develop self-mastery:

- **Goals** – Self-mastery starts with a vision of how you want your life to be. It’s vital to set goals, and to get into the habit of moving towards them every day.
- **Attitude and emotion** – Don’t let your emotions control you, ensure you control them. Focus on something positive every day. Be grateful for things. Resist the temptation to blame yourself when things go wrong.
- **Determination** – Ever set a goal and not followed it through because of a lack of perseverance or self-control? It’s universal. Determination often comes in short bursts and is often strongest when we first embark on change. Harness your initial burst.
- **Focus** – How much time do you waste during your work day? What could you accomplish if you fully used the hours available? Start by working on your concentration. Focus on one task at a time, and slowly increase your level of focus.

**Self-discipline** pushes us to deliver on our best intentions, even when we don’t feel like it. With it, we can trade short-term pleasure for long-term gain. It’s an essential quality, and a key differentiator between people who reach their goals in life and those who don’t.

For example, research has shown an adolescent’s level of self-discipline is a more accurate predictor of success than measuring their IQ.

**Self-regulation** is the ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check, and to think before acting. It’s one of the five elements of emotional intelligence (knowing your emotions; managing your emotions/self-regulation; motivating yourself; recognising and understanding other people’s emotions and

managing relationships).

Self-regulated people can calm themselves down when they're angry, cheer themselves up when they're down. They're flexible and can adapt to work with anyone.

We can all control how we react to situations. Build on your skills by leading with integrity, being open to change, practising self-discipline and believing in yourself. Keep calm under pressure by identifying your stress triggers and reframing negative thoughts. Always consider the consequences of your actions.

**Self-care** is consciously looking after yourself, by preserving and improving your mental and physical wellbeing. Without self-care, your self-discipline, self-mastery and professionalism will become an unsustainable grinding pressure – and your self-regulation and general wellbeing will go out of the window!

Persistent self-imposed obstacles to self-care include feeling unnecessarily guilty (don't!), worrying what others will say, putting it off, learned behaviour, and feeling unimportant or undeserving. Remember, it's not selfish or a luxury to look after yourself, too.



**“TRUST THAT OTHER PEOPLE MAY KNOW BETTER THAN YOU” – AMANDA SOLOMON**

#### INTERVIEW

Amanda Solomon is the founder of [H18 Foundation](#), a social enterprise in Cape Town which upskills and empowers local women by training them to make and sell environmentally sustainable craft products.

In 2021, Amanda took part in [Social Enterprise Connect](#), the first online community of practice platform for social entrepreneurs across South Africa, offering collaboration and networking opportunities, practical tools and resources, and access to an exclusive funders' database.

Below, she reconnects with Social Enterprise Academy Facilitator, [Khwezi Fudu](#), to discuss self-management.

**Khwezi Fudu:** When Covid-19 hit and mobility was highly limited in the country, that obviously impacted your ability to produce. How did you navigate that and what in yourself had to change? What did you have to draw on personally to help you navigate those beginning stages of Covid-19?

**Amanda Solomon:** We had closed the coffee shop and moved out of the business unit into a house at that point. We went into lockdown on 27 March and I realised that we couldn't just sit around as H18 Foundation would never survive. So I contacted one of my friends and she sent me patterns and instructions. We already had some sewing machines and decided to start making face masks. We also started a food parcel programme – after five months, we were providing food parcels to 95 families every week.

I was contacted by [Changemakers hub](#) [a platform that markets social enterprises and charities] to submit our products for an opportunity to export to the US via a group called Mana Boxes, who wanted to help women-owned enterprises in South Africa survive Covid-19. We developed two new products using 100% raw cotton string, we crocheted up a handbag with a leather handle and a shweshwe [a traditional fabric] lining and a sunhat. Our first order was for 1,000 hats and 1,000 handbags, to be delivered in eight weeks!

We asked everyone on the food parcel programme who could sew, who could crochet – and in the end we had 52 women (including myself, an assistant and my mum) in a crocheting team, a sewing team and a leatherwork team. Everyone was earning, socially distancing and making our products.

We moved again in January [2021] to a closed-down preschool. Since the beginning of H18 Foundation, the women had always brought their children to work and they played, safe and supervised, but not getting an education. So I opened a preschool on the premises, called 'Mana' preschool because the Mana Boxes team have helped us financially. The children have been going to preschool since February this year and the growth and development of the children is unbelievable.

**KF:** You were talking about the self-management qualities that you had to look for in yourself and your team, but is there something about your own drive and your ability to manage your thoughts and beliefs and reactions to situations?

**AS:** I think what I found out about myself is you are as strong as you have to be at any time in your life, and no matter how hard the challenge, if you believe in the results you're targeting you can achieve anything.

What I learnt, dealing with so many people and especially during Covid-19, is that I had to be adaptable, I had to believe in myself and I had to learn to focus.

Covid-19 has made me change from organically running things to being someone who has to strategically focus and get to that goal to make things work. So there was a lot of adaptability and I had to believe I could do it.

**During Covid, I learnt that I had to believe in myself and I had to learn to focus**

I learnt a lot about my team during this time – how capable, driven and hard-working my production managers are, and how they believe in our goals and H18's mandate to empower people. Without them I don't know where I'd be.

So there was a lot of believing in ourselves, working together, holding each other up and being totally open and raw and honest and not pretending we were ok when we weren't. Actually leaning on each other during such a stressful, hard-working time.

**KF: Self-discipline pushes us to deliver on our best intentions, even when we don't feel like it. How did you stay focused when setting up H18 Foundation?**

**AS:** I have an uncanny ability to stay focused when there is a lot of noise and activity around me. I also have to switch from task to task throughout my working day, which means switching focus regularly. I am outcomes driven, and when I have a goal, whether it be completing a document, or creating a preschool, I like to work to the goal and achieve positive outcomes. I believe this is what keeps me focused.

**KF: Self-care is consciously looking after yourself, by preserving and improving your mental and physical wellbeing. How do you practise self-care?**

**AS:** I haven't been very good at self-care since Covid-19 started, and I only became aware of that when I found I was getting sick very regularly. My self-care is time out to myself, doing things that I enjoy.



*Above: H18 Foundation provided food parcels to 95 families a week during the height of the Covid-19 crisis (credit: H18 Foundation)*

It involves some quiet time to relax. I am lucky in that I do enjoy being alone, and as my day-to-day is very noisy and busy, the silence of being alone, doing a puzzle, or playing a game on my phone, or watching a TV show that only I enjoy, this is my rejuvenating and recharge time.'

**Say 'I am so stuck' – don't be afraid to ask**

**KF: Can you suggest some advice for any social entrepreneur to navigate a time of uncertainty?**

**AS:** Through this time I have leaned on my network of people. You have to trust that people will be there for you, not just your loved ones, but someone outside of your immediate environment, too. Say 'I am so stuck' – don't be afraid to ask for anything. You have to ask and you have to be open to receive and know that you have limitations.

So one of the biggest things is networking and making friends, and not thinking you're better than everyone. Trust that other people may know better than you, and you can ask them and they can advise you.

I learn something every day – I learn from my beneficiaries, I learn from my staff – you can never stop learning, you can never know enough. There is always something you can learn from people and I think being open to that is so important.

## **EIGHT WAYS TO DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE**

### **1. Choose a goal**

Choose one goal to focus on. For instance, exercising every evening, or reading one

leadership book a week to enhance your skills. Or you could even practice self-discipline on very small goals – such as focusing on a piece of work for an hour without checking your messages or avoiding unhealthy food for a day.

Starting small is the best way to start developing self-discipline. Make sure your goal is **SMART** – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound – and break the goal down into smaller sub-goals where you can.

## 2. Find your motivation

Once you've chosen a goal, list the reasons why you want to achieve it. Try to express these reasons in a positive way. So, instead of saying "I want to exercise three times a week to lose weight," you might say "I want to exercise so that I have the energy to play with my kids and work successfully".

When you list the reasons why you want to achieve something, you'll find it much easier to get the job done.

## 3. Identify obstacles

Now identify the obstacles you'll likely face when working toward your goal and devise a strategy for overcoming each one.

Imagine your goal is to spend, say, an hour on focused learning a week to enhance your skills. But even when you find material you like, it's hard to find time to read it. And you get distracted by messages coming in while you're reading.

So, try keeping a list of recommended reading to hand – including inspirational blogs, engaging podcasts or videos, short courses on LinkedIn or Mind Tools – so you always have something worthwhile to do to work towards your learning goal.

Then find [more time in your day](#) to focus on reading. Maybe in your lunch hour, or while you're waiting to pick your kids up from school. Make sure to turn your notifications off when you want to focus and block out time in your calendar, so people know not to disturb you. And so that you don't book meetings yourself!

Often our self-discipline crumbles because we haven't identified the obstacles to achieving our goals and have no strategies to overcome them. This shakes our resolve. Don't skip this step!

## 4. Replace old habits

When we're developing self-discipline, we're often trying to break a bad habit. However, if that habit is tied into a certain time of day or routine, breaking it can leave a hole. If we don't replace that habit, then its absence becomes even more noticeable.

Say you're trying to stop yourself shopping online when you take a break at work. So instead of online shopping, you could do some stretches in your office, get a coffee or take a quick walk outside. These behaviours will help support your goal and strengthen your self-discipline – instead of leaving a tempting gap, ready to be filled with something unhelpful.

## 5. Monitor your progress

As you work on your self-discipline, pay attention to how you're feeling as it develops and strengthens. You might feel free, happy, proud and energised.

Also, think about keeping a journal to write down your self-discipline goals and to track your progress. This reinforces the positive changes you're making and gives you a record you can look back on to see the progress you've made.

## 6. Save yourself from distractions

The best way to do this is to make it harder to engage in the activity you're trying to avoid. For instance, if you need self-discipline to focus on work instead of looking at social media, then use an app or your device's built-in settings to temporarily mute notifications or block sites so that you can't access them at work.

## 7. Salute yourself

It's important to acknowledge your success and steps towards your goal. Celebrating your accomplishments will keep things fun and strengthen your resolve to keep going.

## 8. Fight the fear of failure

Don't let a fear of failure or an occasional setback discourage you. All of us experience setbacks and failures – it's part of life! Acknowledge that you slipped up, learn the lesson, take it to heart and move on.

See setbacks as an opportunity to re-evaluate your goal, refocus and get support with the next steps.



### EXPLORE FURTHER ON PIONEERSPOST.COM

#### READ:

[Beating burnout: how social entrepreneurs can avoid going beyond their limits](#)

#### WATCH:

[WISE100 Star of the Future on overcoming her biggest fear](#)

# SHIFTING YOUR FOCUS

Below is an activity to try the next time you find yourself in a difficult situation or changing circumstances. You can complete this on your own or with your team.

In his book 'Do One Thing Different', Bill Hanlon suggests that in order to manage these situations, we shift the focus of our usually narrow-focused attention, broaden our view and search for aspects of the situation we have never really noticed before.



## STEP 1: ACCEPT

Is there anything you can do about this situation right now? If so, what is the first step you will take? If not, how can you come to accept and make peace with what you can't change right now?

## STEP 2: ANALYSE

Where are your moments of choice in this difficult situation?

## STEP 3: REFLECT

What's the best way you've ever handled a situation like this before?

## STEP 4: FACT CHECK

What can you see and hear about this situation (what are the facts?) and what conclusions (stories, judgements, criticisms) have you made about those facts?

## STEP 5: LEARN

If you are going to have to get through this challenging situation anyway, what can you learn from it?

## STEP 6: ENERGY FOCUS

Is this where you want to put your energy and attention? If not, where would you rather focus your energy and attention?



# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 5: CRITICAL THINKING

Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson

*It's a highly valued asset in the workplace – and it's one of seven skills every social entrepreneur needs in order to survive. Read on for expert guidance on developing the mindset and skills to become a critical thinker, making you a better leader, too.*

Critical thinkers accept nothing at face value. And, whether we realise it or not, we're all "critical thinkers". After all, we make hundreds of decisions every day. We all use critical thinking to assess the likelihood of something happening, or of it being true.

Critical thinking is the objective, evidence-based analysis of an idea or theory. It requires you to question assumptions and seek opinions that challenge the prevailing wisdom.

Collecting, analysing and evaluating information are important skills in life, and a highly valued asset in the workplace. And combining these key skills with a critical thinking mindset will help you to make better, well-informed decisions.

## HOW DO CRITICAL THINKERS THINK?

Critical thinking is the discipline of rigorously and skillfully using information, experience, observation and reasoning to guide your decisions, actions and beliefs. Actively question every step of your thinking process to do it well.

People who score highly in critical thinking assessments are also rated by their managers as having good problem-solving skills, creativity, strong decision-making skills and good overall performance.

When presented with an argument, a critical thinker will ask:

- Who is saying this?
- Are they credible?
- What is their motive?
- Are they biased?
- What evidence do they have?

**Many of the decisions we make in life are subtly informed by our values and beliefs**

## KEY CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Focus on the three following areas to develop your critical thinking skills:

### Curiosity

Be willing to explore alternative approaches and experimental ideas. Can you think through "what if" scenarios, create plausible options and test out your theories? If not, you'll tend to write off ideas too soon, and miss the best answer to your situation.

Stay up to date with facts and trends. Don't allow yourself to become "blinkered"; always be open to new information. Look for opposing views or evidence to challenge your assumptions. Seek clarification when things are unclear.

### Logical thinking

You must be skilled at reasoning and extending logic to come up with plausible options or outcomes.

Emphasise logic over emotion. Emotion can be motivating, but can also lead to hasty and unwise actions. Try to control your emotions and be cautious in your judgments. Know when a conclusion is fact and when it is not. "Could-be-true" conclusions are based on assumptions and must be tested further.

### Self-awareness

Many of the decisions we make in life are subtly informed by our values and beliefs. These influences are called cognitive biases – and it can be difficult to identify them in ourselves because they're often subconscious.

These could be, for instance, **confirmation bias** – prioritising data that supports our beliefs. Or **stereotyping** – unconscious preconceptions that affect our reasoning.

It is vital to understand yourself in order to understand other people's points of view.

What's behind their issues, behaviours and objectives? Be sure to question your own emotional response to these as part of the decision-making process.

Practising self-awareness will allow you to reflect on the beliefs you have and the choices you make. You'll then be better equipped to challenge your own thinking and make improved, unbiased decisions.

## DEVELOPING A CRITICAL THINKING MINDSET

Combining the above skills with the right mindset can help you make better decisions. Develop your critical thinking mindset by following this process:

### 1. Gather information

Collect data, opinions and facts on the issue you need to solve. Draw on what you already know. Consider any gaps in your knowledge and seek to fill them. Look for information that challenges your assumptions and beliefs. Verify the authority and authenticity of your sources.

### 2. Analyse

Now observe the information you have gathered, and interpret it. What are the key findings and main takeaways? What does the evidence point to? Start to build one or two possible arguments based on what you have found.

### 3. Evaluate

The final step involves challenging the information and rationalising its arguments.

Apply the laws of reason (induction, deduction, analogy) to judge an argument and determine its merits. To do this, it's essential that you determine the significance and validity of an argument to put it in the correct perspective.

Remember, too, to take a step back from the data gathered to give yourself the big-picture perspective. Follow the evidence – look at all the information you have gathered, look at where it's pointing, and make an informed choice.



**“LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT COLLATING AVAILABLE INFORMATION, AND MAKING THE BEST DECISION YOU CAN”  
– MARTIN AVILA, CEIS**

### INTERVIEW

Martin Avila is the CEO of [Community Enterprise in Scotland \(CEIS\)](#), which was established in 1984 and aims to make Scotland a better place to live and work with a more inclusive economy.

In 2015, Martin took part in [Leading Edge](#), a leadership programme designed for social enterprise CEOs in Northern Ireland, delivered in partnership with [CO3](#).

Below, Martin talks with Social Enterprise Academy CEO, Neil McLean, to discuss the topic of critical thinking and the value of lifelong learning.

**Neil McLean:** So, Martin, can you tell me a bit about your own background and how it led you to be at the [Kinning Park Complex](#) [a community centre in Glasgow] when we met in 2015?

**Martin Avila:** After leaving university I went down the social entrepreneur route. I used Scotland Unlimited startup funding at the time to start a social enterprise called Xchange Scotland. I was active in the field of promoting multicultural understanding and active citizenship through volunteering and non-formal education and as a result I became involved with the Social Enterprise Academy. I applied through [Just Enterprise](#) and went on the Leading Edge programme – a programme for chief executives of social enterprises and other third sector organisations.

**NM:** Can you talk about your experience of taking time to develop your leadership practice?

**MA:** There was me and a whole host of other chief executives from a range of organisations of different sizes, coming to learn more about themselves and go on an educational leadership journey.

The section that stayed with me the most was learning about your own leadership style. It

isn't just about identifying your own strengths and weaknesses, it was going out and asking others how they perceive you. That learning about yourself and that self-acceptance and acceptance of others and being able to view others – not just through this kind of binary lens of a good or bad person, or somebody you like working with – but as a unique individual with their own working style, and their own needs for information to be presented in a certain way, and my needs to work in a certain way, was really valuable.

***Much of your experience is socially constructed, and when you realise that, you realise it can be deconstructed***

In a non-formal, peer learning environment, if people have the right values, are guided by the right values and have a shared and common aim, which is to learn together and from each other, the diversity in the room is directly correlated to the strength of the learning experience. The value you can see in having a conversation with your previous self as well as with your future self are both equally valuable. If you believe in the power of non-formal diverse learning, it is the only way to approach it.

**NM: What else do you think has helped you to develop your capacity to understand yourself better?**

**MA:** A great deal of self-acceptance and self-compassion. When you have those, it's much easier to extend that out to others.

That emotional intelligence, if you want to call it that, takes time. It takes reflection, it takes going back and looking at situations, it takes talking through why things are in there. Like any other kind of muscle, it needs to be developed over time and I think that's where non-formal programmes like Leading Edge become so valuable.

You realise that so much of your experience is socially constructed, and when you realise that, you realise it can be deconstructed.

**NM: How do you think taking time to develop your self-awareness has helped you manage the interactions you have with other people?**

**MA:** It gives you a better understanding of yourself but also a better understanding of others. In a leadership position, you're really focused on the outcomes rather than the experience. If you have an objective that you want to achieve and someone else comes with another point of view which is impeding you directly achieving that objective, you can see that as a source of frustration. But if you have a little bit more self-awareness, it allows you to understand where they might be coming from and why they might be

raising these points.

It allows you a lens to view not only your own reactions to a certain situation, but also what other people might be telling you. You can't meet everyone's goals all the time, especially when there are difficult decisions and compromises that need to be made, but having a deeper understanding of why people might be asking these questions may well lead you to make better decisions.

**NM: What would you say to someone who says that might sound fluffy and soft, rather than the tough decisions we have to make in leadership roles?**

**MA:** At the end of the day, leadership is about many things, but it is also about collating all of the information and making the best decision you can, based on all of the information available to you.

Because there's making a decision for allowing the outcome that you want to happen now, but there is also making the decision and implementing the process that allows for a successful outcome to keep repeating itself. It's possible to get to where you wanted to go, but to have created so much damage along the way that ultimately you are going to make it more difficult in the long run.

***Leadership is about many things, but it is also about making the best decision you can, based on all of the information available***

So I think it's about not only getting where you want to go now, but also about creating the conditions to continually have success into the future. Because in a leadership role there's no day in which the battle is won!

**NM: It sounds like you're saying that critical thinking is completely linked to that self-awareness, and understanding responses. What have you learned about critical thinking that you think would be helpful to others?**

**MA:** Yes, I would struggle to see the difference between the two. Having a language and framework to engage in these concepts, having theories and research will help you to engage with these thoughts. If you develop the practice of saying to yourself:

- What am I trying to achieve today?
- What did I achieve today?
- What are the emotions I felt today? Why did I feel these emotions?

- How did those emotions affect the decisions that I made?
- Could I have done things differently?
- To what extent were the decisions I made driven by emotions or past assumptions, or what else was going on there?

If I was getting frustrated at a certain person because they acted in a certain way, what was driving that frustration? If I was overly eager to please or if I avoided having a crucial conversation because I didn't want to stray into a territory, that might lead to a negative emotion.

I think anyone would benefit from doing that regularly – that's the most difficult part. [But] the more you become committed to this practice [of asking these questions], the better your practice will be.

## CRITICAL THINKING IN ACTION: SIX WAYS TO IDENTIFY MISINFORMATION

Sorting fact from fiction in a world where we are all bombarded with information from the media (and social media) is a critical skill for everyone. For social enterprise leaders, who are often working at the front lines of critical and much-discussed issues such as Covid-19 or climate change, getting to the truth of the matter matters.

To help you do this, use these six steps:

### 1. Develop a critical mindset

Misinformation is often believable, so it's easy to get caught out. Many fake news stories are also written to create shock value, that is, a strong instinctive reaction such as fear or anger in readers. Keep your emotional response in check. Ask yourself, "Why has this story been written? Am I being triggered?"

### 2. Check the source

Check the web address. Spelling errors in company names, or strange-sounding extensions like *.infonet* and *.offer*, rather than *.com* or *.co.uk*, may indicate the source is suspect. Consider the source's reputation and professional standing. Are they known for their expertise on the matter? Trusted online sources like Snopes can help you to verify stories.

### 3. See who else is reporting the story

Has anyone else picked up on the story? What do other sources say about it? Professional global news agencies such as Reuters, CNN and the BBC have rigorous editorial guidelines and extensive networks of highly trained reporters, so are a

good place to start. But no one is unbiased, and anyone can make a mistake, so keep looking.

### 4. Examine the evidence

A credible news story will include plenty of facts – expert quotes, survey data and official statistics, for example. If these are missing or the source is an unknown expert, question it! Does the evidence prove something really happened? Or has it been selected or even 'twisted' to back up a viewpoint?

### 5. Look out for fake images

Modern editing software has made it easy for people to create fake images that look professional and real. But there are some warning signs. Strange shadows on the image, for example, or jagged edges around a figure. Google Reverse Image Search helps you check whether the image has been altered or used in the wrong context.

### 6. Check that it 'sounds right'

Bear in mind fake news is often designed to 'feed' your biases, hopes or fears. Use your common sense. For example, it's unlikely your favourite designer brand is giving away free dresses to everyone who turns up to its stores.

If the evidence suggests that the information you have is fake, or if you have any doubts about it, avoid sharing it with others and spreading misinformation.

The central point of critical thinking is to develop and trust your skills of discernment and to develop your 'gut instinct' – the development of your own self-awareness and intuitive sense.



## EXPLORE FURTHER ON PIONEERSPOST.COM

### LISTEN:

[Fit for the future: it takes 'tough conversations' to create a sustainable social business](#)

### READ:

[Five ways social ventures are fighting fake news](#)



# LADDER OF INFERENCE

**Communication is the key to critical thinking and successful relationships. Being aware of our thought processes is an important part of successfully communicating – both for what we say and what we hear.**

The Ladder of Inference (developed by Chris Argyris, detailed in *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge) describes the process that many of us use unconsciously. We add potentially incorrect meaning to a conversation or experience by making assumptions, drawing conclusions and then adopting beliefs or taking actions based on these assumptions and beliefs.

It is our beliefs (conscious and subconscious) which influence the selected data and experience we pay attention to, and the meanings which we give to it, which are frequently based on our assumptions:

## STEP 1:

Our brains pick up pure data – just like a photograph. Everything is captured. At this moment, there is no meaning to it. It's just data. Then we go into the subconscious process:

## STEP 2:

From what we observe (step 1, data) we start to filter and select specific pieces of it.

## STEP 3:

We start to add meaning to the data, based on our experiences and beliefs about the world.

## STEP 4:

We make assumptions from the meaning we have added to the data.

## STEP 5:

We draw conclusions and create beliefs.

## STEP 6:

We adopt those beliefs.

## STEP 7:

We take action based on those beliefs.



## TRY THIS EXERCISE

A simple test of this is to give three people exactly the same picture and ask them to tell you what it's all about.

You will get three different stories. **It's not the picture that tells the story, but us interpreting the picture**, based on our experiences and beliefs.

## DEVELOPING OUR CAPACITY FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking means developing our ability to consider all aspects of a situation, to discern our own internal responses to information and situations, to form an objective analysis and evaluation before taking action.

Here is an alternative ladder process to consider, either to evaluate a current situation or to apply to a previous situation to gain insight.

**1. Observable data** Notice the totality of the situation without narrowing it down – what do you see, hear, sense? Take account of all the information presented to you.

**2. Select data** What data and information do you automatically assess first?

**3. Add meaning** Notice or write down your initial thoughts and feelings about the situation – and begin to look at what beliefs, ideas or generalisations are behind these. What meaning or meanings are you attributing to this situation based on the information you have so far?

**4. Draw conclusions** Notice what conclusions you are drawing from the meaning you have added to the data. Does the meaning come from this current situation or are you attributing meaning based on previous experiences?

**5. Adopt beliefs** What beliefs about the world and this situation have you developed because of these conclusions?

**6. Take action** Notice what actions you are thinking of taking or have taken in the situation. Can you identify how this has been influenced by your beliefs?

**7. Assumptions** Do you notice any assumptions you have made in this situation, based on these beliefs?

Do this exercise without judgment. How we attribute meaning and make assumptions is an unconscious process. This exercise will help you to identify and bring your awareness to your current thinking so you can identify where you would like to make changes to how you assess situations. It can support your development of self-awareness, which also enhances better decision making.

# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 6: EMPATHY

*Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson*

*Empathy helps us to resolve conflicts, create more productive teams, and improve our relationships with co-workers, clients and customers. It's also an essential survival skill for social entrepreneurs: find out how to develop your empathetic side as a leader.*

It may surprise you to learn that the infamous 16th-century philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli was a master of cognitive empathy.

And he certainly advocated developing the ability to understand how people were feeling. But then only to ruthlessly manipulate and exploit the emotionally vulnerable.

It doesn't have to be like that, of course. Used positively, empathy can be a powerful tool to tackle everyday problems. According to the leading British psychologist Professor Simon Baron-Cohen: "Empathy is like a universal solvent. Any problem immersed in empathy becomes soluble."

Understanding other people's emotions, then, is a key skill in the workplace. It can enable us to resolve conflicts, create more productive teams, and improve our relationships with co-workers, clients and customers.

## WHAT IS EMPATHY?

In its simplest form, empathy is the ability to recognise emotions in others, and to understand other people's perspectives in a situation.

At its most developed, empathy delivers insights to improve someone else's mood and to help them through difficult situations.

***Empathy can enable us to resolve conflicts, create more productive teams, and improve relationships with co-workers, clients and customers***

Empathy is often confused with **sympathy** but they are not the same. Sympathy is feeling concern for someone but doesn't involve shared perspective or emotions, as empathy does.

You can feel sympathy for someone in tears, for

example, without knowing anything about why they are crying. Sympathy may develop into empathy, but not necessarily.

## HOW TO DEVELOP EMPATHY

According to influential psychologist Daniel Goleman, empathy is one of the five key components of **emotional intelligence** – a vital leadership skill we will cover next in our [Survival Skills for Social Entrepreneurs series](#).

Empathy develops through three stages: cognitive, emotional and compassionate.

- **Cognitive empathy** is being aware of the emotional state of another person. It is a mostly rational, intellectual and emotionally neutral ability. This means, as stated above, it can also be used for negative purposes.

Managers may find cognitive empathy useful in understanding how team members are feeling. And from that, what style of leadership would get the best from them on a particular day.

- **Emotional empathy** is engaging with and sharing those emotions. It's sometimes called "affective empathy" because it affects or changes you. For some, though, this can be overwhelming. Becoming immersed in other people's problems can sometimes damage your own [emotional wellbeing](#). Avoid this by taking breaks, checking your boundaries, and strengthening your ability to cope.

Anyone leading a team will benefit from developing at least some emotional empathy. It helps to build trust between managers and team members, and to develop honesty and openness.

- **Compassionate empathy** involves taking action to support other people.

Acknowledging someone's hurt is valuable, and affirming their reaction by showing signs of those feelings yourself even more so. But best

of all is putting aside time for them and offering practical support or guidance on getting through the situation.

To use empathy effectively, give your co-worker your full attention, looking out for verbal and nonverbal clues to help you fully understand their situation.

Set aside your own assumptions, acknowledge your colleague's feelings, allow an emotional connection, then take positive action that will improve their wellbeing.

**Asking the right questions is probably the simplest and most direct way to understand another person**

When in doubt, invite the person to describe their position some more, and ask how they think they might resolve the issue.

After all, asking the right questions is probably the simplest and most direct way to understand another person.



**“EMPATHY HELPS US NURTURE COMPASSION, WHICH HELPS US TO TAKE ACTION” – RU YI TEH**

#### INTERVIEW

Ru Yi Teh is an aspiring social entrepreneur with a passion for mental health, youth development, sustainability and climate change. In 2021, she took part in [Project VISION](#), a programme designed to support young people in Malaysia and Scotland to exchange and develop ideas in response to global climate challenges. Below, Ru Yi talks with [Naadia Ahmad Mazlani](#), education and learning coordinator at the Social Enterprise Academy, to discuss empathy and how it has influenced her journey to becoming a social entrepreneur.

**Naadia Ahmad Mazlani:** Ru Yi, can you tell me a bit about yourself? What are you passionate about and what has motivated you to want to become a social entrepreneur?

**Ru Yi Teh:** I am Malaysian and regard myself as a mental health advocate who is really passionate about sustainability and youth development. I am working on being a social entrepreneur. I find that mental health is a really big issue all around the

world and not just for young people, but for changemakers and entrepreneurs as well. So I am now looking at how I can integrate sustainability and mental health together – the key idea I am looking at now is a nature-based solution for mental health.

Nature is free therapy for us. But we have been ignoring it for so long and we are destroying it every day, so it's critical for me to find a solution through [The Ripple Effect Community](#) [the project Ru Yi created this year] where we can integrate mental health and nature-based solutions together.

**NAM:** This is a great initiative and I'm so happy that we are hearing about more and more people focusing on using nature-based solutions for mental health. So, today we're talking about empathy. Ru Yi, what does empathy mean for you and how do you actively practice empathy?

**RYT:** To me empathy is a skill that we have to develop throughout our lives and something we have to practise every day. Not only to improve our empathy, but also to reflect and pause and see which stage are we at and any lessons our empathy has brought us to.

**Empathy is a skill that we have to develop throughout our lives and something we have to practise every day**

I think we need to free our minds, be open-minded and free of judgment – this is how I practise my empathy. We have to be 'empathetic' to ourselves first. I don't think we should underestimate the power of self-love or the power of empathy, because these two things will create the wisdom for us to nurture compassion, which helps us to take action and to achieve more.

Another key word is connection – we have to connect. For me empathy is the ability to understand and then connect with other people's perspectives, emotionally or cognitively.

Even though we can't put ourselves 100% into other people's shoes, I believe we have shared emotions. We feel happy, we feel sad, we feel angry, we have all these emotions and they are a universal thing, so it is how we connect – we connect through feelings and through emotions.

It is trying to connect with other people free from judgement and being open-hearted and kind-hearted, so that's what empathy



means to me, and why is it so important, because empathy can nurture kindness, and kindness is a very, very rare value, I would say it is a skill as well.

**NAM:** Why do you think it is especially important for aspiring social entrepreneurs to practise emotional and compassionate empathy?

**RYT:** In our era, because we are becoming more and more robotic, less and less thinking happens, and then less and less human and social connection, so empathy can really help us to view our kindness towards ourselves, and towards other people. This is how we can come up with ideas and see things from a very new perspective to really help solve our world's problems.

When I was volunteering at the [Perhentian Turtle Project](#), I was healed by nature but at the same time, I felt guilt and anxiety – I saw the reality of the drastic impact of climate change and human behaviours on the animals and the ecosystem on the island.

**While eco-anxiety grew inside me, I realised that I have to act for my mental health before I act for the planet**

While eco-anxiety grew inside me, I realised that I have to act for my mental health before I act for the planet. I found my community to support me. I met a group of people with love, empathy, kindness and integrity. I gained strength from them with their openness and willingness to share and to support. And now I have the headspace to do more for the people and the planet that I care about.

**NAM:** Thank you Ru Yi, I can totally relate to what you say about how empathy can nurture kindness. In that sense, how do you think empathy has helped you to better understand and support people through The Ripple Effect Community?

**RYT:** Project VISION focused a lot on storytelling; through the stories and through listening, it cultivated our senses and through the probing questions, it prompted us to reflect more.

The facilitators asked us to ask questions and to question ourselves through feedback. Those questions helped us to reflect and then to basically think more. From thinking and asking, empathy just happened!

Especially hearing from those in Malaysia was inspiring – people in our country doing so much for the environment. I got a lot of ideas and insights from them as well; I had to evaluate my

vision as I asked myself questions or people asked me questions or shared their thoughts.

I think the programme helped us to understand ourselves more, and through that it helped me to connect with my community. I know myself more and I could share more with them, which stimulated our empathy as well!

**NAM:** So Ru Yi, what is next for The Ripple Effect Community?

**RYT:** The Ripple Effect Community is still at its infant stage – I am focusing on research and awareness currently and my ultimate goal is to develop a social enterprise business model that could help young people who are suffering mentally.

If you resonate with my story, you are never alone, and you can join me today at The Ripple Effect – a community where you can gain social support and build your resilience to act for the people and planet you care about.

Find out more about [The Ripple Effect Community here](#). [Project VISION](#) was delivered as part of [British Council's A.R.C Challenge Malaysia](#) during COP26.

## FIVE STEPS FOR EMPATHETIC LISTENING

Empathetic listening goes beyond the skill of “active listening”. It allows you to develop and enhance relationships due to a deeper understanding of what is being conveyed, both intellectually and emotionally. Here's our five-step plan to develop the skill:

1. The role of an empathetic listener is to be **supportive, kind and caring**.
2. Listen carefully and **without judgement**. Interject occasionally to show that you've understood what's being said.
3. Where appropriate, **repeat key phrases** to encourage the speaker to open up.
4. Pay attention to what's **not being said**, too. Take note of the speaker's emotional state, their tone of voice and their body language.
5. And, when you successfully win their trust and confidence, make sure that you **respect it**.



**EXPLORE FURTHER ON  
PIONEERSPOST.COM**

**LEARN:**

[Seven things that helped me to build a remote team from scratch](#)

[How empathy can turn a company into a changemaker](#)

# DEVELOPING EMPATHY

## EMPATHY WALK

The term “**Empathy Walk**” was coined by **Dr. Edgar H. Schein**, Professor Emeritus at the **MIT Sloan School of Business**, and one of the most well-known theorists of organisational culture. He proposes that a leader should open their heart to their team by taking an empathy walk with them.

## PROCESS

1. Spend some time thinking about **someone within your team or organisation who has a very different life experience** to yours.
2. Make contact and arrange **to spend at least half an hour getting to know the person you picked**. (Go for a walk, meet for a coffee, or an online Zoom session). Try to learn enough about that person’s world to get a feel for what it would be like to live in that world.
3. Try to put yourself in that person’s shoes. Listen empathically. Ask questions. **The purpose is for you to understand** the other person’s perspective, **not to influence or change** the person.
4. It might be interesting to **ask questions around what life and career aspirations they have**, and what they think would help them to achieve these.
5. After you come back from your walk or zoom meeting, **write a reflection paragraph** following your empathy walk. Then think about:
  - How can you use empathic listening to better understand the unique points of view, contributions and perspectives of the members of your team, colleagues, etc?

*Source: Edgar H. Schein, Professor Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management*

# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' SURVIVAL SKILL NO. 7: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

*Kevin Dunne and Claire Wilson*

*Want to manage relationships better, stay calm in a crisis and inspire others?  
Enter emotional intelligence – a key leadership skill and one  
that's vital for social entrepreneurs.*

People with high emotional intelligence are usually successful in most things they do. Why? Because they are who other people want on their team.

Emotionally intelligent people are masters at managing their emotions and don't get angry in stressful situations. Instead, they have the ability to look at a problem and calmly find a solution.

They're excellent decision makers, and know when to trust their intuition. Regardless of their strengths, however, they're usually willing to look at themselves honestly. They take criticism well, and know when to use it to improve their performance.

And because they have strong relationships with the people around them, and are calm in a crisis, they move through life far more smoothly than those who are easily angered or upset.

**Emotionally intelligent people have the ability to look at a problem and calmly find a solution**

Social entrepreneurs, as we know, often work in sensitive areas, with vulnerable people, and have to deal with many complex and unpredictable situations. Emotional intelligence can be a cornerstone in navigating these challenges.

Since emotional intelligence incorporates all of the previous skills covered in our [Survival Skills for Social Entrepreneurs series](#), that makes it the most valuable skill of all.

## WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise our emotions, understand what they're telling us, and to realise how they affect people around us.

In tandem with this is the ability to read other people's emotions, to understand them, not be fazed by them, and to manage them.

Emotionally intelligent people are really good listeners and understand what to say to people to make them feel better, and know how to inspire them to act.

Emotionally intelligent people, then, often have great leadership potential. [Research](#) by the Leadership Institute at the University of Nebraska, for instance, found that emotional intelligence was "positively related to the various dimensions of transformational leadership".

**Emotional intelligence incorporates all seven Survival Skills for Social Entrepreneurs – that makes it the most valuable skill of all**

## THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

American psychologist Daniel Goleman developed a framework of five elements that define emotional intelligence – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

- **Self-awareness:** You understand your emotions, and because of this you don't let your feelings rule you. You are confident – because you trust your intuition and don't let your emotions get out of control. You are also willing to take an honest look at your strengths and weaknesses, and work on them to perform better.
- **Self-regulation:** You have the ability to control emotions and impulses. Typically, you don't allow yourself to become too angry or jealous, and don't make impulsive, careless decisions. You think before you act. You are thoughtful, comfortable with change, have integrity, and are able to say no.

- **Motivation:** You are willing to defer immediate results for long-term success. You are highly productive, love a challenge, and are highly effective in whatever you do.
- **Empathy:** You have the ability to identify with and understand the wants, needs, and viewpoints of those around you. Even when those feelings may not be obvious.
- **Social skills:** You are easy to talk to and are typically a team player. Rather than focus on your own success first, you help others develop and shine. You can manage disputes, are an excellent communicator, and an expert at building and maintaining relationships.

As you've probably realised, emotional intelligence can be a key to success in your life – especially in your career. The ability to manage people and relationships is a vital attribute in all leaders, so developing and using your emotional intelligence can be a highly effective way to show others the leader inside of you.



## “EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLAYS INTO CREATING A NURTURING WORK CULTURE” - TESSA CHARUPATANAPONGSE

### INTERVIEW

[Tessa Charupatanapongse](#), based in Singapore, is the co-founder of [MindTerra](#), a social enterprise that supports young professionals in Singapore and Thailand to develop their mental resilience and wellbeing.

In 2021, Tessa took part in the [ASEAN Social Enterprises Development Programme](#), an accelerator programme supporting young people across south-east Asia to create positive changes within their community.

Below, Tessa talks with fellow social entrepreneur and Social Enterprise Academy facilitator, [Rachael Millson](#), to discuss emotional intelligence and the impact it can have on individuals and organisations.

**Rachael Millson:** So Tessa, can you tell us about your social enterprise? How did MindTerra start?

**Tessa Charupatanapongse:** It started in the early days of the pandemic, convening friends and friends of friends together for online writing

sessions. We realised that writing had this healing power of bringing people together, making people feel safe and comfortable about being vulnerable.

We then got a partnership with a journal company in the US called [Passion Planner](#) and did some workshops for their community, which brought in more people. So for a long time, MindTerra's scope was journaling for your mental wellbeing.

But then my co-founder and I moved back to Asia from the United States and we wanted to pivot and create something for the Asian market, because we're both originally from Thailand. Right now we are working to improve workplace mental wellbeing and build resilient and nurturing workplaces through training workshops, tools and coaching.

**There are two layers. One is understanding your own emotions. And the second is knowing what to do with those emotions**

**RM:** Can you give us an example of the kind of training and workshops that you're offering?

**TC:** We tailor the training to what each company wants. It's kind of in two bits – the self-part and then the collective part. To build a resilient company and workplace culture comes first from your self-awareness – that you have to be aware of your emotions – and then when you're able to build that emotional awareness, you build confidence.

Then, we look at the collective company culture – it becomes like communication or [empathy](#) – how do we connect with others? It's really dependent on what the company wants, but it's around trust and communication, soft skills, coaching and nurturing leadership.

**RM:** The work that you're doing, as you've described, is very specifically focused on emotional intelligence with your clients, so it's perfect for this conversation. What do you understand by emotional intelligence when you hear those words? What does it mean to you?

**TC:** I think there are two layers to this. One is understanding your own emotions. And the second part is knowing what to do with those emotions. So that's for the self, but then there's also understanding other people's emotions and understanding how you relate to those emotions.



**RM:** It's what we do with that emotion or how it spills over into our interactions with others that can become a problem. Through the work that you're doing, are there any tips that you have in terms of self-management?

**TC:** This may sound really weird, but being grateful for it, because we're human, right? And part of what that means is that we have the capacity to feel all these complex feelings and emotions.

I think a lot of times when we feel emotions, especially the negative ones, there's this desire to just get rid of them. So: feeling it out, sitting with it, reflecting on it. Where did it come from? So you know for next time. Then it's finding your own way to work through whatever you're going through, whether that's processing with a close friend or going for a walk. Everyone has their own way of managing that – so everyone needs to find that for themselves.

***Often when we feel emotions, especially the negative ones, there's this desire to just get rid of them***

**RM:** You're supporting people to become more in tune with their emotions and find ways to enhance their emotional intelligence. Yet in some cultures, either national cultures or organisational cultures, it can still be quite a taboo subject whereby people don't necessarily see its value. Is there anything you can share about this and how it has impacted your work?

**TC:** Yeah, absolutely. I think, obviously, in Western cultures there is less stigma against these conversations. But what we are trying to convey is that by doing this, there's more stress, more burnout. There's a decline in productivity. There's more isolation, there's difficulty to connect with other people. And especially with the nature of work changing because of Covid.

We are now feeling a little bit more isolated. The boundary between work and home and private life has blurred with work – you're online all the time now. I think companies that care for their employees' mental wellbeing and growth as a person, those are the ones that are going to flourish. Not just because they're caring for their people, but because when you care for your people, your people bring more, they're able to show up more presently for work.

**RM:** So what would you say are the top benefits to an organisation of really focusing on enabling emotional intelligence?

**TC:** Oh, that's a good question. I think trust and resilience really capture all of them. Linking that to Goleman's framework, it goes from the self to other people. You trust yourself, you trust your co-worker, and you trust your team.

When you are [resilient in your own personal life](#) that means you can be resilient in the workplace as well. And so when we're looking at the emotional intelligence spectrum of self and others, it plays really well into creating a great nurturing work culture overall.

**RM:** Can you give us an idea of how you have developed your own emotional intelligence?

**TC:** You are the only one who's going to be with yourself for the rest of your life. So why not spend some time getting to know yourself? I have been journaling since I was seven years old, when I was in third grade; it's just been a practice of putting pen to paper for me. I don't really have a structure but I find that with journaling, it's putting whatever is in my brain out into the world, releasing it and reflecting through that process.

**RM:** And how have you used the development of your own emotional intelligence to inspire or motivate others working with you?

**TC:** I think for me, it boils down to treating them as people and not as employees, and that goes back to communication. It's really just connecting with them as people and showing that genuine curiosity to learn more about their lives and their journey and how you can be a part of that journey.

**RM:** Is there anything else concerning emotional intelligence that you use that you think would be particularly useful to share with others?

**TC:** You really are the average of the five people you spend the most time with... I would say spend time with people who help you become better in the ways that you want to become better, who help you discover yourself and who push you in the right direction.

Spend time with people who are either filling your cup or making you feel more energised afterwards, instead of people who are taking away from you. I think through those positive interactions, you discover more about who you are. You discover yourself. You feel nurtured.

We want to see emotional intelligence as a capacity to nurture and develop. I think that this whole process is an ongoing one. It's something that continues to happen every day as we evolve – I don't think it's ever static.

## SIX TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The good news is that emotional intelligence can be developed. Try these six tips:

1. **Observe how you react to people** – Do you rush to judgement before you know all the facts? Do you stereotype?
2. **Develop humility** – You know your accomplishments and can be quietly confident about them. But give others a chance to shine and don't worry too much about getting praise for yourself.
3. **Do a self-evaluation** – Have the courage to look at yourself honestly: it can change your life. Take an [emotional intelligence quiz](#) to start this process.
4. **Examine how you react to stressful situations** – Do you get upset every time something doesn't happen the way you want? The ability to stay calm and in control in difficult situations is highly valued, so keep your emotions under control when things go wrong.
5. **Take responsibility for your actions** – People are usually more willing to forgive and forget if you make an honest attempt to make things right.
6. **Examine how your actions will affect others** – And do this before you take them. Put yourself in their place. How will they feel if you do this? If you must take the action, how can you help others deal with the effects?



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# ENHANCING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE [EQ]

Daniel Goleman is an American science journalist, author and psychologist who is widely known for populating the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ). In his 1995 book *'Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ'*, he outlines five key components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

This exercise invites a threefold method for enhancing three of these competencies.

## STEP 1

### Know yourself – notice emotions and reactions

Noticing is the first action: become more aware of your feelings and emotions as you are feeling them and notice how you respond to those emotions and feelings. There is no need to change or alter how you are feeling; this step involves only giving your attention to the feelings and emotions. It takes practice, so begin with the emotions that are more readily identified.

Practising this exercise develops your capacity for self-awareness.

**Ask yourself:** What emotion am I feeling right now in this situation? How am I responding to these feelings?

## STEP 2

### Choose yourself – pause to respond intentionally

Once you begin to notice and be aware of your responses, the invitation is to pause when you notice a feeling or emotion, and make a conscious choice about how you respond rather than an automatic reaction.

This exercise develops the emotional intelligence competency of self-management – the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses.

**Ask yourself:** Who am I choosing to be in this situation? How do I choose to respond?

## STEP 3

### Give yourself – connect on purpose

This is an invitation to connect with others in an empathetic way. Once you are aware of your responses to your own feelings and emotions, apply this insight to your interactions with others. Use the steps above to first notice the feeling, then pause before responding, choosing your action, and then consider what might be happening for others in this situation.

Being curious allows a pause in response to also consider what is happening for other people, and builds your capacity for empathy, a key aspect of emotional intelligence social competencies.

**Ask yourself:** What might have led to this situation? What might have led this person to react in this way?

*Source: Adapted from 'Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment (SEI)', accessed via the [Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations](#).*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

How might you use this process more purposefully in your day-to-day role?

What actions might you take as part of this process?

How might improving your emotional intelligence improve your effectiveness in your organisation?



