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# APPLYING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A Practitioner's Guide


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## CHAPTER

John D. Mayer

## Personality Function and Personality Change

In mid-life, Shannon was diagnosed with cancer. She had been a shy child, raised by her mother and stepfather in a trailer park. Her stepfather isolated her and her mother from the rest of the family, told neighbors that his family was crazy, and physically abused his family members. Shannon came to avoid others, labeling herself as shy. No one in their family had attended college, and, after high school, she joined the Navy. In the Navy, she was assigned to a personnel position for which she regularly needed to interact with others. This, in turn, forced her to act in a more outgoing fashion.

While in the Navy, she married – but discovered over time that her husband was both an alcoholic and physically abusive. With help from a crisis center, she divorced him, taking their then 1-year-old son with her across country. After some time, she found a job with the military managing workers in a compensation program, and married and divorced a second time.<sup>1</sup> (pp. 14–16)

Shannon's life to this point suggests that she possessed some considerable strengths, but was struggling with crucial personal issues surrounding her relationships, as well as with challenging life circumstances.<sup>2–5</sup> As a single mother, Shannon went on to manage a workers' compensation program at a military base. In the face of considerable resistance from other personnel, she constructed a set of coherent policies for administering compensation that became a model for that used on other bases. She felt rightfully proud of her accomplishments. Yet her success left her feeling uncomfortably unfulfilled. She felt increasingly

troubled by her difficulty in relationships, her lack of education, and her growing economic woes.

Then Shannon was diagnosed with cancer. She thought, "If this is midlife, I don't want to see the rest of it."<sup>1</sup> (p. 15) Yet she saw some possibility of change. In addition to the medical help she sought for her cancer, she began to see a counselor who urged her to take stock of her life. With the counselor's help, she began to review her life, and – looking inward to her personality – to recognize her weaknesses, strengths, and to think about how she might go on.

Personality can be defined as the global function of an individual's major psychological subsystems: motivation and emotion, knowledge, the self, and social action. Taking stock involves examining those systems and how they have functioned, along with how well they have served to meet one's goals and desires. Such stock-taking can lead to changes that may promote a better future.

After both medical and psychological treatment, Shannon's cancer went into remission. She perceived her regained health as a defining event of her life, enhancing her sense of independence and achievement, and her connection to a higher power. A further outcome of those events was that, at the counselor's suggestion, she began to attend college classes. Ultimately, she enrolled in a highly prestigious college, and remarked at the time on her belief that her new beginning "will definitely change everything that happens to me from here on out."<sup>1</sup> (p. 15) From desperate circumstances, Shannon had succeed in envisioning and creating a life with greater promise.

For many people, personal development involves seeking to strengthen and improve their personalities.<sup>6</sup> By doing so, they hope to surpass self-perceived limitations and to engage in life in a new or renewed fashion. For example, people may notice personality patterns that hold them back – repeated poor choices, or repeated conflicts with others. Taking stock of such repeated patterns can lead to growth, as was the case for Shannon.<sup>1</sup>

An individual may take stock of his or her strengths and weaknesses in many ways. A middle-aged man may review his life story, its ups and downs, and its mistakes and triumphs. On that basis, he may develop a clearer sense of identity. In contrast to the individual, psychologists often are interested in developing general principles that are useful to nearly anyone. A scientific approach begins with a generic understanding of the structure of personality, i.e., what are the key areas of one's personality and how do they interact?

This chapter presents a general description of personality and how it operates, examines some of the techniques developed in psychotherapy practice to improve personality, and then returns to what personality does, with specific attention to how it can be improved. This coverage can

be of use in understanding, evaluating, and comparing schools of psychotherapy, coaching, and other programs that promise personality change.

## □ How Does Personality Work?

To improve personality, it helps to have a broad working model of the system. Practically speaking, there are at least three general approaches to creating an overview of personality. Each of these is of value, but each also has a different emphasis. The first creates an overview according to the psychological traits, such as extraversion and neuroticism, that describe personality. For example, the Big Five trait approach describes personality according to five dimensions: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness.<sup>7,8</sup> This approach tells us about important parts of personality, but without a sense of how the system functions.

A second approach is to divide personalities into types. This approach is promising but is still in an early developmental phase, with its methods, and consequently its findings, still being worked out.<sup>9</sup>

The third approach to personality offers a rich description of personality and how it works. This approach divides personality into broad structures or areas. For example, personality can be divided into areas of motivation, emotion, and cognition, or alternatively into the id, the ego, and the superego,<sup>10-13</sup> and newer more comprehensive divisions are available as well. These divisions then can be used to organize traits according to the structural areas they describe. For example, motivational traits such as the *need for achievement* describe the motivational area; cognitive traits such as *intelligence* describe the cognitive area.

In this third, structural, approach to personality, the divisions of personality help to identify important portions of the system; each area is partly distinct from other areas and, collectively, the areas comprehensively cover personality's functions. One of the most up-to-date of these divisions of personality is the *systems set*, which divides personality into four areas: energy development, knowledge guidance, conscious self-regulation, and action implementation.<sup>14</sup>

To better understand personality, it helps to go through the structures one by one. This process leads to a sense of the personality system and how its parts operate individually and together, and how the system can be changed and improved. The energy development system will be examined first, for it is here that a person's potential actions begin.

## Energy Development

Mental energy can be defined as the potential mental activity people can draw on to function psychologically. People draw on such mental energy to think and act, and are guided by that energy to desire some things and not others. If an individual does not have adequate energy, he or she may be unable to accomplish much, no matter how smart, socially adroit, or self-aware he or she is. Energy levels are crucial to directing an organism's action.

A person's energy development is determined by the level of his or her motives and emotions. As a person's motives rise, the individual will sense energy with which to act; similarly, as his or her coordinated emotions rise, the energy to act becomes more intense still – and may even need to be held back. Motives represent basic urges which propel the person to act. The person experiences urges to eat, drink, engage in sex, and defend his or her territory, among other drives. In human beings, at least, such urges extend to include a person's need for achievement, for power, and for sociability (affiliation).

Motives express only the wants of the individual. Such motivational urges operate independently of what is right or wrong, or even what might work best to attain a goal. In some reptilian species – such as lizards and alligators – motives to stay warm, catch prey, and copulate may be sufficient for survival and reproduction. These animals lay their eggs and move on; they are solitary and do not raise their young. Such a non-social motivational focus is, however, inadequate to guide the lives of mammals, and especially the lives of the mammal *Homo sapiens*.<sup>15,16</sup>

Humans exist in a more complex social reality. Human young are vulnerable and defenseless for an extended period of time, requiring parents to be emotionally attached and protect them. Humans usually need emotional attachments and commitments to each other to survive. In such organisms, motives are joined by a second system that helps to develop energy – the emotions system.

Emotions guide motives by enhancing or discouraging the likelihood of their expression at the right moments. For example, the emotion of anger amplifies the motive of aggression. An emotion such as love will amplify the affiliative motives – to join with others. Sadness encourages isolation.<sup>17</sup>

Emotions emerge at the "right moment" to enhance or discourage a motive because those emotions are a person's internal signals as to the individual's progress in the social world.<sup>18</sup> For example, happiness arises when a friendly remark occurs, and, as such, happiness amplifies affiliative motives at a generally good time for social interaction. Anger arises in response to injustice and that is a time when an aggressive response might be needed.

So, energy development depends on motives and emotions working together. Some co-pairs of motivations and emotions have to do with satisfying underlying biological needs (self-preservation and fear), some with intrapsychic needs (e.g., being happy), others with satisfying social needs (affiliation and love). Energy develops toward specific aims. These aims, in turn, are represented in mental models of how the world works and how to get the things we want in life. These and other functions of energy development are shown in the first row of Table 5.1.

**TABLE 5.1. A functional analysis of four areas of personality**

Core Functions	Interactive Functions	Outcomes
<p><b>Energy Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify psychobiological urges and desires</li> <li>• Translate biological needs into psychological motives</li> <li>• Attach emotions to motives so as to socially regulate motives</li> <li>• Recognize the interrelation of emotions and their use to regulate (amplify; diminish) motives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect urges and desires to internal representations of aims and goals (with knowledge guidance)</li> <li>• Directly express socially permitted urges and action (e.g., extraversion; introversion) with action implementation</li> <li>• Modulate energy so that it is controllable (with self-control)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High versus low motivation</li> <li>• Emotionally-blocked versus freely-flowing motivation</li> <li>• Positive versus negative motivational energy</li> <li>• Positive versus negative emotional experience</li> </ul>
<p><b>Knowledge Guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop one's models of the self so as to record one's history and understand one's limits and strengths, and to represent oneself to others</li> <li>• Develop specialized knowledge of the world for advanced and enhanced decision making in key areas</li> <li>• Develop models of others so as to promote healthy outcomes later</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop concepts of life possibilities for use in personal planning over time (with self-control)</li> <li>• Develop comprehensive vocational plans that fulfill biological needs while meeting social expectations (with energy development; action implementation)</li> <li>• Develop relationship plans that meet needs and social expectations (with energy development; action implementation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly knowledgeable versus naïve or ignorant about the world</li> <li>• Good versus bad attitudes about the world</li> <li>• Constructive versus negative thinking styles</li> <li>• Good versus faulty understanding of other people and the social world</li> </ul>

*Continued*

TABLE 5.1.—*continued*

Core Functions	Interactive Functions	Outcomes
<b>Action Implementation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop social skills so as to carry out actions effectively</li> <li>• Develop effective skills with which to carry out tasks</li> <li>• Receive social feedback and social rewards</li> <li>• Develop healthy relationship and attachment patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow for natural expression of social urges and action (with energy development)</li> <li>• Develop actions in such a way as to promote positive emotions (with energy development; knowledge guidance)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural and genuine social expression versus false and affected expression</li> <li>• Socially skilled versus clumsy and awkward interpersonal activity</li> <li>• Skilled versus unskilled at technical tasks</li> </ul>
<b>Conscious Self-Regulation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentience</li> <li>• Monitor the time sense and plan in time</li> <li>• Develop self-control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervene in emotional regulation of motives where conscious modifications are required (with energy development)</li> <li>• Monitor changing external conditions for opportunities for more effective, creative action (with action implementation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good self-control versus impulsivity</li> <li>• Strategic versus unclear or abdicated personal planning</li> </ul>

Unfortunately, energy development sometimes goes wrong. People plagued by guilt and doubt may find it hard to act under many circumstances. More severely, depressed individuals experience little motivation in any area.<sup>19</sup> A person with many motives and positive emotions, by contrast, will be highly motivated. Some outcomes of energy development are shown in the final column of the energy row.

### Knowledge Guidance

Energy development occurs within the context of the person's mental maps or models of the real world. For example, the motive to eat has as its goal of finding food. The notion of food and where it can be found is recorded in the individual's mental models. As another example, sociability has the aim of finding others to be with; those others and their possible behaviors also are recorded in an individual's mental models.

Personality is a psychological system that exists exclusively inside the mind, with no direct contact with outside reality. At the same time it controls a body that does function in an outside world, outside the head. Personality meets reality, in part, through the doors and windows of psychological perception. It receives information through eyes, ears, and touch. In addition, it can test the outside world by directing action in it, and observing the consequence of those acts. Nevertheless psychology is within and other people and objects remain forever outside the skin, beyond personality. These outside agents are, for that reason, known through the individual's mental models only imperfectly.

To be sure, some concrete representations seem real and secure enough. Mental perceptions of stones, rivers, or of a smiling face seem so real that we accept their existence with little question. These representations are near hard-wired representations of the outside world and we navigate them automatically. Motives and emotions attach to these basic representations, and so close are they to reality that we do not usually distinguish *our idea* of a table at which we dine from the physical reality of the table itself. Similarly, we thirst for the river's water, smile at another's smile, and fear the snake, only rarely realizing that we respond to our internal map of each of these, which is but a piece of their total reality. In each instance, the psychological system has produced internal mental indicators of this external reality.

The outside reality of even these day-to-day representations is more complex than perceived. Our thoughts of the river are not the same as the river. If we misread the river's physical reality, we may drown in it. In place of the outside mother, there is an internal representation of mother that is mapped onto incoming sensory signals. In place of the outside home, there is an internal representation of home that is partial.<sup>2,20-23</sup> The six-year-old knows some things about a house: about hiding places and where mom and dad and sister and brother are apt to be, where to find food, where the bathroom is, and the like. The mother and father have a sense of the child's-eye-view of the house, but coupled with that they know all about the appliances, the square footage, the mortgage and how to cover it, and the like. These models – the six-year-old's and the parents' – are both seemingly sufficient for their purposes, yet neither knows all about the home.

A historian may know the age of the house, who owned it 200 years ago, and the owners' part in a political movement. Reality is rich and mental models are always incomplete representations of it. This means that two people may possess substantially different models of a complex entity, and yet each possesses an equally valid representation. As an aside, this is especially true in the realm of ideas. A conservative and a liberal may both start from sound data, and develop well-argued positions

from reasonable principles. Both may have equally good – but equally partial – models of the infinitely complex reality. Superficially, they appear to disagree; more deeply, each possesses a partial truth.

Not only are our models incomplete, but they are often systematically incorrect and biased. We distort things to suit our own perspectives.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes the bias goes to the extreme. The paranoid person possesses a cognitive style by which he or she inevitably seeks clues of disloyalty. Because all information is ambiguous, it often is possible to construct a loosely-fitting paranoid theory. It is just that other, non-paranoid models usually fit the facts a bit better.<sup>25</sup>

The things we are motivated to attain in the social world always involve our model of reality rather than the reality itself. The better one's mental models represent the outside world, the more successfully the personality system will operate. Poor or incomplete models will lead to the frustration of the energy development. It is in part for this reason that we often feel slightly disappointed (or worse) at having gained what we wanted. It is, similarly, for this reason that the lover is correct when she says, "you don't love me, you love your image of me."

In contrast, good models will facilitate the success of even weakly developed mental energy. A low-energy person who knows just what she wants and knows exactly how to get it may be extremely effective at taking steps to succeed despite limited energy stores. Moreover, the better our models, the more handsomely they are rewarded by society. People with mental models shaped and developed by extensive formal education earn far more than others.<sup>26</sup> The functions of knowledge guidance, and its outcomes, are summarized in the second row of Table 5.1.

Why are these mental models so important? It is not enough to want to achieve, or even to feel confidence and pride around achieving. If you do not know what you want or how to go about getting it, you are unlikely to meet your needs.

## Action Implementation

The individual's mental life takes place in an internal world of mental models that represent reality at one remove. Mental energy develops and is attached to internal mental models. These models correspond to actual goals present in the outside world that may satisfy one's needs. Once goals have been established, the mental system must provide plans for action so as to attain their ends.

Action takes place at various levels of sophistication. At the basic end of this hierarchy are motor skills and actions that are more-or-less automatically expressed by most healthy people past childhood: walking

someplace, eating food, shaking hands, smiling as another person passes, and the like.<sup>27</sup>

At the middle and higher stages of social implementation, personality draws on more complex skills. Children with better social skills are better able to join another pair of children who are playing. Socially skilled children ask what is going on and then join in. If two children are playing Batman and Superman, a socially skilled child will say, "Okay, I'll be Spiderman, what are we going to do?" Less socially skilled children are likely to make less relevant remarks. They may say, "My mom is getting me shoes this afternoon."<sup>28</sup>

If one has the energy and the right knowledge, success is probably possible with even minimal social skills. An executive who knows what he wants may attain it, even if he behaves abruptly and without sufficient consideration for others. It helps, however, to be skilled at social implementation. The motivated genius is likely to do better if he or she knows how to maintain friends, contact scientific authorities, and behave appropriately in social situations. Or, as another example, highly attractive people require skills to meet their social needs. An attractive man or woman who lacks social skills to keep away some of those attracted to them, may end up quite unhappy in life, attached to indifferent partners, or making partners they do care about jealous.

### ***Action Implementation and Energy Development***

Some people may be high in knowledge and implementation skill but low in the mental energy to carry it out. For example, someone can know what the right action is in a particular situation, and can even demonstrate this right action when it is prudent, as in a job interview, yet rarely put the skills into play when on the job, because he does not regard it as a priority and does not have sufficient energy to carry it out. Some of the characteristics of action implementation are shown in row 3 of Table 5.1, along with some outcomes of this area.

### **Conscious Self-Regulation**

Mental energy can develop, become associated with relevant mental models of the outside world, and generate plans for attaining needed aims, all with little awareness and little self-consciousness. So, a child rehearses tying her shoelaces until finally it requires only minimal concentration. An adult accustomed to a daily commute can drive it with little attention to the surroundings. Sometimes, however, such action can go awry – the person on a diet finds himself opening the jar of chocolate

sauce from the refrigerator, or the driver finds herself lost en route.<sup>29-31</sup> In human beings, and perhaps in other animals, there exists a capacity for internal observation, review, and intervention called conscious self-regulation. We possess sentience – a sense of being alive, of mattering, of caring what we think and do.<sup>32-34</sup>

Teaching people the techniques of self-control can alter their behavior and allow them to respond flexibly to difficult situations. As a simple example, teaching children to count to ten before expressing their anger helps provide them with a tool to momentarily inhibit impulsive and regrettable acts, so those acts can be properly evaluated before being expressed. More broadly, it is this consciousness that poses questions such as, “Who shall I be?,” “Who shall I become?,” and “How shall I change?” Measures such as psychological mindedness and mindfulness may capture some of these qualities.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Self-Regulation and Other Functions***

The other areas – energy development, knowledge guidance, and action implementation – all interact with self-regulation. Energy development may direct an individual’s function so smoothly as to require little self-control. Knowledge about self-regulation may be superior and guide the person with particularly effective suggestions. Finally, when one wants to regulate a social situation, one may possess excellent social skills with which to do it. Some of these qualities can be found in the final row of Table 5.1.

## **How is Personality Changed?**

### **Pathways of Change**

Each of the four areas of personality described thus far – energy development, knowledge guidance, action implementation, and executive self-control – can be changed and improved. For example, various psychotherapies have developed techniques that affect one area of personality or another. There are, of course, many other influences on the individual, including biopsychological influences such as health and drugs, and social influences including socioeconomic resources, friends, family, peers, and culture. Psychotherapy is among those influences and is unique in being selected by the individual, and in being the subject of considerable study. It is, therefore, better understood than many other change agents.

## Some General Aspects of the Therapeutics of Change

Psychotherapy typically involves an interaction between a therapist and a client which is intended to help the client become more psychologically functional and healthy. At first glance, psychotherapy is not specifically aimed at one or another specific part of personality. Psychotherapy often acts in a broad and general way, through common factors – factors that most or all therapies employ. These include, for example, creating a therapeutic relationship, increasing hope, and establishing an expectation of psychological benefit.<sup>36-38</sup> It is also cognitive by nature, because it involves language and instruction.<sup>39</sup>

### Specific Effects

Although much of psychotherapy operates by exerting general effects, psychotherapy also is made up of specific change techniques and these techniques do often influence one or more specific areas of personality. A change technique can be defined as “a specific, discrete, and time-limited act, which may involve providing information, directing behavior, or otherwise exerting influence, which is aimed at modifying an aspect of an individual’s personality and its expression”.<sup>40</sup> (p. 1292)

An example of such a change technique is the empty-chair technique, which involves asking a client to vividly imagine someone (e.g., one’s father) or something (e.g., a wedding ring) in an empty chair and to hold a conversation with that individual or object. Doing so creates an emotionally charged atmosphere and allows the individual to understand how his or her models of other people and the world influence his or her feelings. The empty-chair technique began in a therapy called psychodrama, but later became central to gestalt therapy.<sup>41</sup> Each change technique can be defined and explained apart from any theoretical orientation. These techniques are the building blocks of personality change.

Most change techniques target a particular area of personality. If an individual wishes to enhance her mental energy, for example, several groups of techniques may be particularly helpful. A therapist might try to align a person’s goals in a more productive fashion so as to lessen the person’s motivational conflicts.<sup>42,43</sup> Or, consider emotional responding: Sometimes the emotion system attaches too much anxiety to an object, and a phobia arises. To remove the phobia, the therapist may employ the technique of systematic desensitization, which substitutes a relaxation response for an anxious one. The individual learns to relax in the presence of increasingly phobic stimuli.

Many therapeutic techniques influence knowledge guidance. Cognitive-behavioral psychologists set out to directly assess and change a person's cognitions about the world. For example, in the *reframing technique*, therapists may examine a person's negative perceptions of a situation and help the individual to see its positive aspects as well. The therapist's hope is that changing the individual's cognitions will activate more positive emotional patterns, and, in turn, facilitate social functioning.

Action implementation more generally involves understanding how to carry out plans in social settings. The technique, *interpreting the transference*, is employed by psychodynamic therapists to point out to an individual his or her maladaptive (or, simply, misguided) behaviors with the therapist. The idea is to indicate repeated patterns of sub-optimal relationships, as they appear in the therapy relationship and elsewhere, and then help the individual to change them.<sup>39,44</sup>

More directly, in Adlerian therapy, therapists help the individual to role-play various social parts, so as to carry them out more effectively. Certainly, many people rehearse stressful social encounters – asking for a raise or asking for a date – ahead of time so as to carry them out more gracefully when the time arises.

Finally, executive self-control, too, can be enhanced. Psychodynamic therapy seeks to accomplish this by placing more of personality under conscious control – that is, by identifying heretofore unnoticed, non-accessed qualities of the self and making them conscious.<sup>44</sup> The technique, *interpreting the defense*, involves the therapist pointing out a person's cognitive avoidance of potentially painful topics (e.g., "I notice that whenever you talk about your brother, you say 'Oh, he's okay' and then move on without considering his presence very much."). As the individual becomes more consciously aware of previously hidden and avoided material, he or she can more clearly think about it and exercise judicious control over its influence. Contemporary research often focuses on evaluating approaches to self-control so as to identify techniques with the potential to enhance an individual's executive governance.<sup>45</sup>

## How Can Personality be Improved?

### **Improving the Personality System**

An individual's personality attempts to satisfy the person's biological needs in a social context. These needs can be relatively basic, such as with food and drink, or more complex, including concerns for safety, esteem, and love. The individual may be trying to assert some sense of unique

individuality or to fulfill – to actualize – his or her sense of self. All the parts of personality – energy development, knowledge guidance, action implementation, and executive consciousness – cooperate in these goals.

Yet, the developmental plan for each individual will be different. Each person has a different genetic endowment, a different set of skills and qualities, a different family, and different values . . . The individual may live in an individualistic or a communitarian culture. Moreover, personality is typically, by comparison with the biological and social systems around it, a relatively weak system, bobbing about in an ocean of potentially threatening or promising current events and influences. It should be clear that optimizing personality will depend in part upon the individual's context, that is, *actualization can be defined in different ways by different people*. A person can be actualized according to his or her skills or motives, according to others' wishes, according to society's needs, or according to some global zeitgeist, religion, or philosophy.

The systems set offers some simplifications and approximations that, although inadequate to capture the individual's full complexity, may nevertheless be helpful. Each area of personality can be improved, and as each is improved different advantages occur. For example, improving energy development means developing motivations that will help the individual, or means helping to fulfill the individual's already-existing adaptive needs. It means developing good emotional reactions to situations, and tying them to those better motivations. For example, a man who believes that he is not worth very much may allow his supervisor to order him around, which, in turn, makes him feel further depressed and deprives him of rewards. By re-rigging his energy development, he may learn that he is worth more and uncover a motive (and the accompanying social skills) to assert himself appropriately.

As regards mental models, improvement here involves creating more accurate models of the world. Mental models of significant others, friends, spouses, and the like, all may need development in individuals who come from troubled home environments. Psychotherapeutic practices and group psychotherapy may be of some assistance in such instances. For example, a woman whose father was an alcoholic and spoke down to her might develop an attraction to being in such a relationship again as an adult. To avoid this, she may need to create new models of men before marrying, so as to be able to connect emotionally to healthy men and to learn the behaviors useful for healthy relationships. For many people, the *main event* here is one of education (consider Shannon in the opening case). The use of school systems and institutions of higher learning to create more accurate, efficient mental models of the world is well known, and the value added to the individual hardly needs to be restated in an information age. At the same time, people also possess mental models that

are not developed or examined in such institutions, such as the models one creates for potential friends and spouses. Both psychotherapy and programs such as those discussed in this book address these other more informal models.

Next, there is the issue of action implementation. Simply recognizing the urge to be more independent of one's supervisor and developing mental models of better ways to relate to people is not enough. A person must have decent ways of expressing the matter socially. Saying to the supervisor "You are running all over me and I am sick of it," may possibly be effective but it is risky and non-optimal. Developing a more considered plan of action – taking into account the conditions at work and the personality of the supervisor and potential opportunities for tact – will be far more likely to bring about a positive outcome in some instances.

Finally, to do all this means exerting self-control: resisting destructive impulses, and waiting until one knows enough and understands what one wants to do and the risks involved. This requires understanding the situation and oneself and electing to change.

## The Nature of Personality Change

Personality is a slow-to-express, slow-to-change system. To be sure, short-term dramatic alterations in personality do take place. Even these brief, dramatic changes may be manifestations of longer-term changes that have built up and then are revealed quickly. The sorts of linear, predictable changes mostly studied by psychologists, however, suggest that long-term slow change is the norm.

Consider the persistence of IQ. A group of preschool children's IQs will correlate  $r = .86$  with their own re-assessed IQs measured one year later ( $r = .77$  at two years) and still be  $r = .59$  after 25 years.<sup>46,47</sup> These correlations indicate that, although people's relative standing on IQ changes over time, such changes arise gradually. The stability of aggression is similar to that of IQ.<sup>48</sup>

As stable as personality is, its influence in any given situation also is quite modest. Most reviews conclude that traits predict individual behaviors in the 10–15% range.<sup>49,50</sup> Small, next to invisible changes nonetheless are likely to accumulate over time, and to have effects on a person's long-term future.<sup>51,52</sup>

This pattern of slow change and gradual influence is likely to explain why attempts at personality change take time. Assuming that a client sees a psychotherapist once a week, only 25% of clients will be detectably improved after 2 months (8 sessions), 50% will show improvement

between 3 and 4 months (13 to 18 sessions), and 75% will show improvement after 6 months (26 sessions).<sup>53,54</sup> Interestingly, survey studies indicate that most people receive only five sessions of psychotherapy, which is not nearly long enough to experience much gain.<sup>53</sup> Patience – even resigned patience – is called for when considering one's own personality. Over time, the rewards of positive improvement, modest though they may be, are likely to become evident – and can gradually make a positive impact on one's social relationships and well-being. For example, if personality accounts for 10% or 15% of the variance of a decision, or the outcome of a situation, those small influences can add up appreciably over a period of time, impacting a person's life dramatically.

## □ Summary and Conclusions

People seek help for many reasons, but chief among them are personal distress along with hope and faith in the possibility of improving who they are.<sup>55</sup> Usually, people enter into an agreement to undergo change so as to feel better and act more effectively when pursuing goals.<sup>56</sup>

This article sketched a view of the personality system as consisting of four major areas of processing: energy development, knowledge guidance, action implementation, and executive self-control. Each of those four areas carries out crucial functions. When those functions go awry, certain problematic outcomes specific to the given area can be observed. For example (and a bit simplistically), depression can indicate an issue with disrupted energy development. Alternatively, impulsivity may indicate issues with executive self-control. Other possible signals of a malfunctioning personality system are shown in Table 5.2 (second column).

When a person desires to change a part of personality for the better, there are usually several alternatives for doing so. Various change techniques exist for each area of personality and many such techniques have been employed and studied in the context of psychotherapy, and sometimes in other contexts as well. Techniques evaluated as effective also are likely to be useful in the context of career counseling, executive development, and in other more personal relationships as well.

When considering a program of change, be it psychotherapy or executive coaching, it helps to consider the areas of personality that are most critically impacted and that require the most change, and then the techniques possible for bringing about such change. For example, coaching programs such as the ones in this volume can impact many areas of the personality systems in a positive fashion. The third column of

TABLE 5.2. Areas of personality and change goals

Area	Motivation for Change	Change Goals
Energy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low energy</li> <li>• Unhappiness and negativity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher, more sustained levels of mental energy</li> <li>• More positive mental energy directed more constructively</li> </ul>
Knowledge Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invalid, naïve models of the self and world</li> <li>• Negative views of the self and world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More accurate and realistic mental models</li> <li>• More constructive mental models</li> </ul>
Action Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor social skills</li> <li>• Negative social impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better talents and skills</li> <li>• More positive social contributions</li> </ul>
Executive Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distracted, limited conscious experience</li> <li>• Impulsivity or overly rigid self-control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better organized, more mindful consciousness</li> <li>• Flexible, efficient self-control</li> </ul>

Table 5.2 illustrates some of the change goals that are relevant to each of the major areas of personality.

The relative stability of personality, its modest power of expression from situation to situation, and the time it takes to change mean that an individual should not expect change right away, but rather must look for small changes over time. Change certainly does arise over time. Although patience is needed, the rewards can be great.

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