

THE UNOPENED GIFT



A PRIMER IN
EMOTIONAL LITERACY



Dan Newby
and Lucy Núñez

Advance Praise for *The Unopened Gift*

Dan Newby and Lucy Núñez are the preeminent thought leaders in the domain of emotions. Their knowledge of and appreciation for the impact and value of emotions to shape our lives is conveyed in easy-to-understand ways in this book. As a coach, I use the distinctions they provide regularly to help clients expand their emotional range and develop new practices that lead to a more satisfying life. *The Unopened Gift* is an inspiring and indispensable guide for anyone seeking to more intentionally capture the power that lives in the emotional realm.

—Kim Ebinger, *Ontological Coach, U.S.*

Dan Newby and Lucy Núñez have written one of the most useful books on emotions that I have ever read. The authors take us on a journey of interpretation (not claiming to know the truth about emotions, which alone is refreshing) of emotions, from the theoretical to the practical. They present a cogent interpretation for what emotions are, but more importantly for me, how to understand emotions, work with emotions, and learn from emotions. This book contains the most comprehensive catalogue of emotions and how we can understand them better than I have ever come across. A most valuable resource for helping professionals, business leaders, and family members who want to be more connected to themselves and to those that they lead and care about.

—Curtis Watkins, *Master Certified Coach, U.S.*

Our work on emotions has been instrumental in fostering a culture of trust and stability in our school district. It is because of this learning that we have become a resilient, compassionate organization characterized by understanding each other first, then celebrating our growth and results

—Julie Everly, *Superintendent, Monroe Public Schools, Michigan.*

With this book, Dan and Lucy masterfully unveil our blindness around emotions. The book provides a powerful, actionable reconstruction of what emotions mean and how to distinguish between different emotions. I have seen no other book on emotions like this one. It clarifies the source of our emotions and invites us to take responsibility for our emotions, and hence our results. It is a must-read for leaders and managers who are emotionally illiterate.

—Sameer Dua, *Founder and Director, Institute for Generative Leadership, India*

This book takes to the next level what Daniel Goleman started with EQ. The thirst for working with emotions is increasing everywhere we look. A must-read for leaders, coaches, and anybody who wants to tap into emotions as fuel for action. Dan's passion of bringing ontological work into the world with his loving care for people and organizations is outstanding. I am grateful to have met him as a teacher, friend, and business partner.

—Mirko Kobiéla, *Senior Director Talent Management at Adidas Group and Founder of Luminize: International Coaching and Consulting, Germany*

This wonderful book is truly a transformational gift to anyone wanting to learn about the much overlooked domain of emotions and how they impact every aspect of our lives. The teaching in *The Unopened Gift* is practical and delivers the perspective of a true practitioner and not an academician. The compendium of distinctions on moods and emotions makes it an excellent resource for novices and a great reference for experienced practitioners. Finally, the potency of this material is just the tip of the iceberg of the transformational experience of working directly with Dan and Lucy.

—Christian Stambouli, *Projects Advisory and Team Performance Consultant, U.S.*

As a professional, husband, and member of society, this book has put an end to my long search for a practical and experiential path to emotional literacy. Really learning emotions vs. just learning *about* them is what you can get by immersing in reading this book. Dan and Lucy open a door to learning how to navigate emotions—which helps us human beings engage in life in many new and impactful ways.

—*Rafael García Monroy, Executive Coach and Trainer, Mexico and Spain*

Emotions drive behaviors which determine results. That's why emotional literacy is absolutely critical for human learning and development. *The Unopened Gift* makes a broad spectrum of emotions easily available to readers who would like to take a first step toward emotional literacy.

—*Reiner Lomb, Ontological Coach and Author of The Boomerang Approach: Return to Purpose, Ignite Your Passion, U.S.*

I used to feel guilty about myself because emotions I considered “bad,” such as anxiety and fear, showed up very often in my life. *The Unopened Gift* opened up the possibilities of befriending my emotions. I feel liberated now, because it taught me that having those so-called “bad” emotions is not a limitation.

—*Jinobi Narain, Director, Learning and Development, Exucate Limited, Hong Kong*

Like many of us, I often struggled to manage multiple commitments as a business owner, mother, and “over-volunteerer.” The emotional learning contained in this book has allowed me to put down my “Superwoman” cape and rediscover the power that I have to manage my commitments. It has definitely brought more peace into my life.

—*Jill Meaux, Coach and Consultant, Excelerant, U.S.*

THE UNOPENED GIFT

A PRIMER IN EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Dan Newby and Lucy Núñez

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If you register at www.dannewby.me, ongoing updates and offers will be available. You will also receive access to a 30-minute video introducing Ontological Thinking and its role in leadership and coaching and its connection to emotions.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our parents, Jesús, Rosa, Don, and May, who were, without doubt, the most influential teachers in our lives, and to our children, Suhail, Rachel, André, Will, and Octavio, whom we love deeply.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi

Translated by Coleman Barks

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PREFACE

Most of us believe that we're fixed emotionally, that the only way we can change in the emotional domain is through years of therapy or drugs. I used to believe that as well, but I don't anymore. For me, the big moment of revelation came during a time when I struggled with anxiety. I lived some dark, confusing, destructive years. My journey out of that time happened because of two things. One was that I engaged in a support group and learned what that had to teach me. The other was learning about emotions. I became emotionally literate. I came to realize that although I was fairly well educated in a traditional sense, I was emotionally ignorant. This was a part of myself that I didn't know anything about or understand even in basic ways.

Opening the door to learning about emotions required me to see my ignorance and relate it to the choices I made each day. I had to learn that the chaos I was living stemmed from my own emotional illiteracy and could only be resolved through learning. We humans are not as rational as we think we are. We reason and use logic, but we're not "rational beings." If we are rational beings, why do we have emotions at all? They would be unnecessary. But what if they exist for a reason? When we explore this idea, we become aware that we have overlooked one of the most important tools we have as human beings.

Do you have a partner or spouse? If so, was the selection of that person a rational choice? You may laugh, because choosing a partner or spouse is

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often the least rational choice we could have made. After thinking this over for a bit, we all can acknowledge that what was driving that choice was emotions. Even if our parents had all kinds of reasons not to or our friends argued against it, we still married that person. The arguments, the logic, didn't matter. It's also true with buying a car, choosing a dog, or deciding what restaurant to eat at. It's true with everything. Is it rational to have children? Well, no, not really. It's not actually a great idea sometimes. But we do it. So then the question is, why do we do it? If we're just rational beings, we should be "smart" enough not to do those things that don't make sense, but we do them. So what's going on? What's going on is emotions, because emotions drive our behavior. And that's not good or bad; it just is.

MY STORY

In the days before I began learning about emotions, *fear* was one of the driving forces in my life. I experienced a great deal of *anxiety*. I didn't know the difference then, but they were both constant companions. There were other emotions too. *Loneliness* was clearly one, and a *lack of self-confidence* was another. But *fear* was the biggest. *Fear* of being alone, *fear* of being rejected, *fear* of getting in trouble, *fear* of getting caught, *fear* of losing my relationships, *fear* of everything. I would say that at that time I lumped all these emotions together into *anxiety*. Later, as I was able to name distinct emotions, I began to realize they were specific *fears*. But at first it was just this big ball of *anxiety*; I was *anxious* about everything. I don't know if what I experienced was technically panic attacks, but I suffered a lot. And I did what a lot of people do, which was to avoid the feeling. I did anything that might help me avoid the pain of fear. I worked too much, I drank too much, I watched too much television, and I even avoided

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my emotions by reading obsessively. These are all things I did because I enjoyed them, but during that time I was doing them to avoid emotions I didn't want to feel or acknowledge. In relationships I had a tremendous amount of *fear* that my partner would leave me, abandon me, and I'd be alone, so I tried to control the relationship. I tried to control the person. I was manipulative as a way to get things my way. But the main thing was to ensure that she didn't leave me—even if she didn't have any intention of leaving, which she didn't. In my mind, her every email, phone call, conversation or interaction was a potential threat. All the time I was thinking that “this is the thing that's going to cause her to leave me.” It was a dark and confusing time.

From the support group I got the idea that what I was doing was running away from emotions. When I felt *anxiety*, I would try to get away from it through compulsive diversions like watching television or drinking. Whatever I did was for the purpose of avoiding my emotions. My mentors told me I needed to find a way to “be with my emotions.” I had no idea what that meant. One day, not knowing what else to do, I decided that if I just sat still, I wouldn't have a choice; I wouldn't be able to avoid them. I had to force myself to literally sit on my hands so that I would remain still and experience the emotions I had been avoiding. It was strange and uncomfortable, but better than the pain and fear. I now realize that in that moment I quit running. I began to do this whenever I felt emotions overwhelming me. Sometimes it would be for five minutes and sometimes twenty minutes, although I can recall times when it was closer to an hour.

My real fear before I began to build an understanding of emotions is that they would kill me, literally, because they were so strong, painful, and scary. It sounds silly now, but at that time I believed it. Little by little I realized that, as bad as they felt, they were not going to harm me. I slowly realized I could learn that I didn't need to *deny* and avoid my emotions even if they

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were very unpleasant. Facing them and understanding them was going to help me even if I wasn't sure how. I got the idea that if I learned something about my emotions, they wouldn't be able to control me in the same way.

For me, desperation occurred when I hit such a low point that the only two choices were to die or do something different. The “doing something different” started with me attending the support group and going through a coaching course that taught me my first emotional distinctions. I began to realize how illiterate I was in the domain of emotions, and that, if emotions drive all our behavior, then surely I was behaving in the ways I did because of emotions. What was missing was that I didn't know which ones were driving me—that's what I needed to learn.

I had the great fortune of always being a learner. My parents were learners, and I was taught that learning is never wasted. So when I could see what I needed to learn or the area in which I needed to learn, things got much easier and I believed that maybe there was something valuable there for me. In the end, that made learning about emotions very logical, useful, and practical for me.

I first became aware of my emotions the day I sat on my hands without doing anything except observing my feelings. At first it was awkward, and I'm quite sure my first steps were inelegant. But little by little I learned to name them and realized that emotions sometimes feel similar, but are distinct. I began to understand that each emotion has its own story, and that if I listen to the story, even if I'm not sure what emotion I'm in, it tells me. I began to recognize distinctions, understand what emotions I was experiencing, how they were urging me to behave, and to question whether the subsequent behavior was something that was helpful in creating the life I wanted. I came to realize that learning about emotions was as important as everything I had learned intellectually up to that point in my life.

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It would be giving me too much credit to say I realized any of that at the beginning. It was similar to beginning a journey by seeing a place that looks interesting and thinking, “Oh, there might be something there for me,” and walking there. And when you get there, you see the next thing, and then you see the next thing. And then, at some point you realize, “Wow, I never had the intention of going on a journey, but that’s what happened.” And it happened because there was something useful continuing to move in that direction. For me, there was something that helped ease the pain and confusion.

That was really the beginning of my getting on the road, taking the first steps, and then having people support me when I wasn’t staying on that journey. But also, there’s something valuable about connecting with the pain of how awful it was to live in *anxiety* and *fear* and realizing that I was creating a lot of it through my own actions. It wasn’t that somebody else was doing it to me.

Before, I always looked *calm* on the outside, but I never felt *calm* on the inside. I was always *terrified*, *anxious*, *doubting* myself, and *fearful*. On the outside I had learned to cultivate the appearance of *calm*, but inside I was not. Now I look *calm* to others and I feel *calm*. There are very few times when I feel *anxious*; it is rare that things *scare* me. There are not many times when I get caught by emotions. I experience emotions, but because I listen to them differently, they’re giving me information. So when I hear myself thinking, “That’s not fair,” I think, “Wow, I feel resentful. What’s that about? And is it based on anything real or is it just some story I made up?”

In the past, my emotions ran me. My emotions dictated what and how I would live my life. Now I would say I’ve befriended my emotions. They serve me. They don’t control me. Of course, there are things I react to, but I have much more choice about how I’m going to respond out of these emotions once I’ve listened to them. So there’s a lovely mix of reactions and

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responses. That was missing before. I didn't have any ability to respond; it was all reactive. The conversation in my head now is focused on embracing the emotion, accepting it, and looking for its value. Embracing an emotion also means not dismissing it as a complete invention. If I feel *fear* that my partner might leave me, then it might be a possibility, but fighting it isn't going to be beneficial. Trying to control her is not going to benefit anything. What's going to be helpful is to say, "I noticed I'm feeling *jealous*, not for any reason. I just have this *fear* that I'm going to lose you or that you're going to go away. I just want you to know that." In the past I would hide it because it was something I couldn't share; I couldn't talk about it because I was *ashamed* to admit it. If I had said, "I'm afraid you'll leave me," I thought that would push her to leave me. So there was even *fear* about *fear* in the past.

Now I would say there's *curiosity* about the *fear*. Sometimes I'm *amused* by the *fear*. I think to myself, "Come on, Dan. You're 61 years old, and you've been through a lot in life. You know how this stuff works. Don't get caught in this. Maybe she is going to leave you. Well, then you'll buy a motorcycle and tour Europe. You'll find something to do. You'll go work on an archaeological dig and you'll be happy, just in a different way." I've come to understand that neither story is true, but they produce different emotions, and I get to choose the story and the emotion I want to live in. The final realization that helped me to *accept fear* was that regardless of how close I am to another person, I was alone already. And it has always been that way. It wasn't that "One day I'll be alone." I will die alone, and whether I go first or second, that is how it will be. *Accepting* that reality was the final step because it allowed me to let go of trying to hold on to my partner. That step brought an enormous *peace* and ease.

Now I have completely different conversations with myself. To put it in my terms, I have different emotions about those emotions, but I would also say

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they're much less powerful, because when I feel *fear*, I can name it; when I feel *jealousy*, I can name it, and I know what it's trying to tell me. The emotion of *jealousy* is not trying to tell me to be afraid; it's asking me, "Are you really paying attention to this relationship? Are you doing everything you need to or you want to in this relationship? Or are you ignoring some things that you think would be good to pay attention to?" It's a pretty good question, because often I'm not paying attention to something that has an impact on the relationship. "So pay attention!" is what my jealousy says.

WHY EMOTIONS?

There are two emotions that allow us to begin a journey into learning about emotions. One is *curiosity* and the other is *skepticism*. When we are *curious* we would say, "I never thought about emotions this way. Tell me more, give me an example, show me how this works." When we are *skeptical* we say, "Wait a minute. That's not what I learned, so I'm not sure if I believe that." That is what *skepticism* as an emotion is intended for. It's supposed to help us figure out what to believe. "Am I going to believe what I learned before or am I going to take this new idea and believe it?" For those of us who have been very steeped in rationalism, who are very logical and cerebral, *skepticism* is quite common. It doesn't mean we won't learn or be open at some level; we're just going to be quite careful at the start. We want to make sure we're not getting tricked somehow with this "emotions stuff." And other people are *curious*. In the end they might believe it and embrace it or they might not, but they know they want to know more.

Emotions and moods are part of everything human-related. Each of us is continually experiencing emotions moving through us in response to the

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events within and around us. Whenever we are in the presence of other people, our emotions are being shared with and communicated to them energetically. Organizations are full of emotional energy that we are continuously trying to align. Leadership can be thought of as “the ability to generate the emotions required for the task at hand.” If it is the case, as this book proposes, that emotions are “that energy that moves us into action,” then the very existence of the organization depends on emotions. Although we often think of politics in terms of a lot of useless talk and the attempt to gain power, we will find the fundamental driving force of emotions underneath those actions. Marketing can be seen as a singular attempt to generate emotions that will provoke someone to buy a product. Successful marketing connects to and leads us into consumerism by leveraging particular emotions. Sports, although generally viewed as an activity of the body, would not exist without the emotions of *ambition*, *pride*, and *disappointment*. The arts, whether fine or expressive, are motivated by yet another set of moods and emotions. Eras in history are often defined by the mood of the time, and geography is often a strong generator of emotions and moods. Lastly, relationships between human beings—whether paternal, familial, or romantic—are all the result of and the origin of innumerable emotions.

It is safe to say that without emotions, humans would not exist. There would be no “reason” to have relationships, take care of each other, work, play, or create. We would not have “the sense” to avoid an oncoming train or not stand close to the edge of a cliff. We would not be driven to discover new places or to invent new tools. In fact, nothing human would occur. There would be no human activity. Of course, without emotions we wouldn’t have ever become human; we would have perhaps stopped developing at the level of reptiles, and that would be the end of the story. Luckily for us, we didn’t stop there.

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Humans have long congratulated ourselves on our intellectual cleverness. We have used reason as a tool to meet the challenges of life, to build an understanding of the world around us that gives us a measure of control. And yet our ability to think and reason has not been sufficient to resolve the challenges we face and those we have created. But because reason is the one and only tool that we believe allows us to navigate life, the only possibility we have is to think and reason more. It is the very success of reason that has blinded us to other ways of learning and knowing.

There are two important reasons for me to pursue the work of emotional literacy. I believe that embracing emotional learning would change every human being's relationship with every other human being. It would allow us to realize and remember that we feel *disgust* not because the other person is *disgusting* but because that is the way we see them. The *disgust* isn't about them; it's about me. It's mine. It's my responsibility. The same is true of *anger*, *jealousy*, or *love*. When I experience emotions, they are my responsibility to be aware of and to act out in my life. It fundamentally changes a person's relationship with emotions when they take responsibility for them—all of them. I can no longer say, "It's okay to hurt this person because he or she made me *angry*." That is no longer justifiable. It is my *anger*; they are just the target. I'm *angry* because I believe something is unjust. That is what the *anger* is trying to tell me. I can react and punish or I can respond by trying to eliminate the injustice, but whichever I choose, it is still my *anger* and my responsibility. We are blind to this out of ignorance. We talk about others "making us *angry*," but overlook that they could have done exactly the same thing to someone else and it wouldn't have triggered anger in them, or someone different could have done the same thing to us and it would not have provoked *anger*. Until we take responsibility for our emotions and learn about them, we can't choose the ones that will support us and serve

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the moment. Emotional literacy gives us an extraordinary tool to create the life we desire.

Embracing emotional learning would also change every human being's relationship with the world and with nature. There's a tremendous desire to have peace in the world. There is a growing desire to live in harmony with the natural world and to stop destroying that which makes life possible. What's in the way? What is in the way is emotional illiteracy. We don't understand emotions in a way that allows us to build what we want to build. Until we embrace the domain of emotional learning, emotions will have us rather than us having emotions.

My vision is that you will use this book as a step into emotional literacy and use it in all areas of your life. My hope is that what you learn from the book will support and enhance your relationships with your partner, family, and friends, and that it will be useful in your life pursuits, whether in teaching, health care, legal services, engineering, or any other area. Emotional competence is part of living a rich human life.

My best-case scenario is that this book will play a role in normalizing emotions so that they become simply a part of who we are and are no longer considered weird or uncomfortable. I believe that if more of us become emotionally literate, it will improve the world in the same way that literacy has.

At minimum I hope that upon finishing the book, a reader may say, "Well, I didn't really understand it all, but there might be something there." If all this book does is open a possibility of viewing emotions differently, I will be satisfied. If a reader comes away with one distinction—for instance, the difference between *service* and *sacrifice*—I'll be delighted. Even the smallest piece learned is valuable and will change your relationship with your emotions.

INTRODUCTION

How to use this book

Every emotion we have written about is important, but some are more common than others. Some like *anger*, *compassion*, or *doubt* are encountered daily, while some—*rage*, for instance—we might experience only once in a lifetime. You might think of the common ones as the middle ranges on a piano keyboard and the rarer ones as the very high or very low notes. All are useful and have a part in a rich composition, but some are used more than others. Sometimes our emotions are like musical chords—three or four notes at a time. Just as with understanding the elements of a chord, it is useful to separate the individual notes to understand them clearly and then see how they sound when played together.

As you read through this book, our hope is that it will provide you with a new way of thinking about emotions, and even more importantly, with tools you can use daily to make more sense of life. We have organized the book into four sections. The first lays out our interpretation of emotions and moods. The second section takes a look at more than 100 of the most common emotions we encounter in our work and how Lucy and I have come to understand them. The third brings this interpretation into the wider world of daily life and experiences, and the fourth is an alphabetical dictionary of

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250 or so emotions that lists each emotion's etymological root, meaning, and purpose. This last section is designed to be a reference tool that can be used whenever you are looking for the understanding of a specific emotion. The index provided will also allow you to easily reference what we have included on any given emotion, so that you can use this book as a resource tool.

In this book we focus primarily on our interpretation of emotions and explore many distinctions. We are aware that much more could be written about emotions and their relationship to the body or biology, and much more could be explored in the area of culture.

We also have not given much attention to the question of how to work with emotions: "How can I shift my emotions?" "What are useful ways of practicing emotions I want to cultivate?" "How can I learn the finer distinctions?" etc. This is an endless and very personal exploration and may be the subject of future books. It is also the work we do personally in our coaching and workshops, and we invite you to contact us if this is of interest.

Human self-understanding is continually evolving, particularly in this area. If you have insights or examples you would like to share, if you notice emotions missing from one of our lists, or if you have an interpretation you believe could expand this body of knowledge, we would be grateful if you wrote us. This is work we are continually immersed in, and as a result, it is constantly evolving and taking on greater nuance. We welcome your additions. We can be contacted by email at dan@dannewby.me or lucynunez.alg@gmail.com.

Finally, you might be curious to know where this interpretation of emotions comes from. It is not our creation, but has emerged from a way of understanding humans focused on the entire being, which has been labeled *ontological*. Briefly, the ontological understanding of human beings is that we are more than simply rational beings and that emotions and the body are

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also legitimate domains of learning and knowing. The ontological perspective is that for the past four centuries we have increasingly seen ourselves as mainly rational beings and have come to believe that learning is solely an intellectual function. Coaches and teachers who embrace the ontological model work with their clients in language (the tool of reason) and pay equal attention to emotions and the body (somatics) in order to help formulate complete and sustainable learning. The ontological model does not in any way deny or diminish rationality, but puts it into relationship with these two other essential parts of our being.

Chapter I

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

T*hanks so much for your email. It came in the midst of my confusion. I cried when I read it but, this time, the crying was good—felt nourishing.*

The emotion of “dignity” feels very right. I was trying to get to “hope” because I thought that that would be the emotion that would serve me. I could not get to “hope.” Dignity was right there.

So, I have been wearing “dignity” for a few hours today and have come up with this declaration: “I will not stand idly by as people spew their ill-will and hate. I will stand up for my own legitimacy as a human being and for others. From this moment on, I stand to protect, cherish, and nourish humanity—mine, yours, and everyone else’s.”

Since I connected with my dignity I have noticed that I am no longer afraid to declare that I am a Muslim. After 9/11, I kept it quiet and avoided the issue as much as possible. If I disclosed, I often qualified it with a “but I am not like the extremists.” I no longer feel the need to hide that part of my identity. Yes, I am still a bit scared, but not petrified, ashamed, or apologetic.

This email recently arrived from a former student and coach. She is someone who uses emotions in her work with clients but, as you can read, has

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learned to apply their power to her own situation. For us this letter is not just about her individual learning and journey but about our collective human journey. Understanding and even befriending emotions is one of the most powerful things we can learn as human beings.

Where We Find Ourselves

The central belief driving the writing of this book can be summarized in six words: “We human beings are emotionally illiterate.” That does not mean there is anything wrong with us, but only that we have not yet learned how to understand emotions in a very useful way. It is similar to an illiterate person’s relationship to written words. He or she can see the writing and understand that the markings have some value and purpose, but cannot figure out how to make sense of them. Although a few people may be incapable of learning to read, illiteracy is most likely the result of not having had the chance to learn. We see a similar possibility with emotions. Humans have tried many strategies, theories, and models to help us understand emotions, but have not yet found one that unlocks their meaning and usefulness. However, there is an interpretation of emotions that we believe does just that.

It seems that for most of human history we have been thinking about and trying to decide how to understand emotions. We have considered them as originating from thinking or from the body. We have thought about them being a result of biological balances and imbalances. They have been classified as a part of philosophy, biology, sociology, and psychology, but the consensus of most theories is that they exist as an inseparable part of our human experience, that to some degree they are part of our intrinsic makeup and the result of our experiences. The place we have arrived at in this journey

Chapter 1: History and Context

is an uneasy and even suspicious relationship with emotions. We tend to see them residing in and emanating from the heart. We believe they are not trustworthy and that they compete with or are in opposition to thinking and logic. We see them as the opposite of reason and generally believe they need to be “gotten out of the way” in order to “think clearly.” We believe they are fixed or at least very difficult to change and that they can only be changed with professional help. Our principal way of interacting with our emotions is to control or manage them, or at least to try. Beyond that, we often fear their power and believe life would be better if we had fewer of them. To some degree we relate to our emotions as if they are an infection or an alien being that has moved in and is doing all it can to undermine our constructive lives. In short, most people are not big fans of emotions and have, at times, wished they would just go away and leave us in the predictable world of reason.

Given this perspective, it is not surprising that we have left learning about emotions to chance. When we survey the subjects that constitute a formal education, the list will be long on cognitive or linguistic topics and will include almost nothing in the emotional realm. In essence we *hope* our children will learn about emotions, but we don't seem to know how to help them in a methodical or formal manner. Our expectation is that by loving them and telling them which emotions are desirable and which are not, they will learn enough. Even when they survive the turmoil of adolescence, it does not ensure they are equipped with emotional competence. Once we are adults, we assume that our emotional makeup is fixed and will not change; hence there is not much value in learning more emotionally unless it is related to an imbalance of what we refer to as our mental health. And in that case we tend to look first to medication rather than learning.

It may be the case with emotions that they are too close to us to notice them. Or it may be that we are aware of them but believe we can get away

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with ignoring them. We may be afraid of them, or it could be that we consider them to be a no longer useful relic of our past in the way we regard our appendixes. Regardless of the reason, the fact that we do not see them as an indispensable part of ourselves leads us to dismiss their value.

It has been a common belief for a long time that emotions and moods are fixed and that there is nothing we can do to change them. The logical outcome of this view is that the only way to relate to emotions is to control or manage them. Most people understand emotions as things that are wired into us, and thus they are seen as things that *control* us. In this case, “us” is synonymous with our intellect, which we have come to see as our only reliable guide in life. So our habitual way of relating to emotions is that we do not trust them and we believe they cannot be relied upon. Most humans are at least uncomfortable with their emotions and in many cases are scared of them.

The Emergence of Rationalism

At least since René Descartes’ statement “I think, therefore I am” in 1637, we have increasingly exalted reason over emotion as the basis of knowing. Until the past few decades, we have generally believed that “to know” was synonymous with cognitive comprehension. Whatever we wanted “to know” had to meet the rules of logic or reason or the associated disciplines of mathematics, physics, and other “hard sciences.” Any “knowing” outside of these was suspect or ridiculed. This belief put the realm of moods and emotions outside of serious consideration as a domain of knowing and learning. Our narrow focus on reason and rationalism resulted in our abandonment of emotions as a domain of learning and knowing unless it was within the limitations of the “soft sciences” of psychology, sociology, and the like. But

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even those were not taken seriously as “real science,” and hence were not thought of as “real knowing.”

We also have for the most part ignored emotions as potentially valuable tools. We have banned or considered them suspect for a long time in organizations. This distaste for emotions in organizations is also historical in nature. During the Industrial Revolution, the concept of a group of people working together shifted from organic to mechanistic as the principles of the machine were applied to human beings. The word *organization* reflects the idea of groups working together being organic in nature. The word *work* and *worker* derive from a mechanical measure of effort. In our workplaces emotions are still trivialized at times and are almost always underappreciated because they contradict the mechanical nature of *work*.

In short, we have confused having emotions with being irrational. They are not the same, and when we do not distinguish between the two, we lose the potential of both. It is interesting to note that although Descartes’ belief became an almost unstoppable force in Western thought, there were those who had other perspectives from the beginning. One of these was Blaise Pascal, a younger contemporary of Descartes, who responded to Descartes’ claim by writing that “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.” All along there have been those who did not see reason as the only way of knowing or even thinking, but it has nonetheless become our common-sense way of understanding ourselves and therefore the world.

Hyper-rationalism and the Devaluation of Emotions

As we have progressed along the path of seeing ourselves as rational beings we have, until recently, become more and more narrow in our view. We

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have approached a kind of hyper-rationalism that completely excludes any form of knowing except reason. In other words, reason is considered the ultimate and only valid way of knowing anything.

This book is based on the concept that the validity of an idea depends on its usefulness. We are not attempting to prove one thing true and another false, but rather to share a perspective that has been found useful and even life-changing by a growing number of people.

It is a tremendous help to our self-understanding as humans to consider emotions a domain of learning equal in value to reason. It is not more or less powerful. It is not more or less reliable. When the two are combined, they can produce a synergy we have not previously experienced and allow us to live more vibrantly and with a greater sense of self-assurance. Humans have long ignored the emotional domain, and by doing so, we have set ourselves up to be emotionally ignorant. The good news is that ignorance can be reversed through learning, and we have that opportunity with regard to emotions. In short, emotions can become one of our key supports in life. We can befriend emotions and we can learn to develop a higher level of trust in them.

The belief, at least in Western culture for the past few centuries, has been that emotions are at least suspect and at best unreliable; they are not to be trusted in making choices, and we need to take the emotion out of the equation in order to make sound decisions. The name we give to this is objectivity, and it is an idea from nineteenth-century science. In that time, it was believed that the observer of an object did not influence or affect the state of the object and thus was separate from the thing being observed. As it turns out, we have learned through quantum theory that this is not the case. The observer has been shown to be a factor in determining the outcome of the experiment, and the old idea that it was possible to be objective has dissolved. We can now see that at the moment of decision the emotions of the

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person deciding cannot be removed. Emotions are a part of the decider and thus a part of the decision-making. It cannot be otherwise.

Given this development in human understanding of the universe (that we are a part of), it's time to consider how we might see emotions through an updated lens as well. Besides demonstrating that “being objective” is not the possibility we thought it was, we have also learned that each of us is a different and unique observer. Thus what we see when we look at the world will depend more on us than on what we are looking at. In the area of emotions, this means that although you and I may both use the word “anger,” we each have our own interpretation for what anger is, what it looks like, and how it feels. Our interpretations are likely to be similar, but they are not very likely to be exact. In fact, there is no way of knowing if they are exact. Thus any emotion can be said to have an *interpretation* but not a *definition* that applies universally.

Emotions and Learning

In the area of emotions, there is something key to be aware of in terms of learning. Because of the mechanistic influence on our way of seeing the world, we tend to think of learning as *accumulating information*. When we approach emotional learning, there is a distinction between *learning emotions* and *learning about emotions*. ***Learning about emotions*** is “taking in and understanding the concepts, the idea and the logic,” all the cognitive ways we can learn *about* a thing. For instance, the way we *learn about cooking* by watching cooking shows on television. ***Learning emotions*** comes through spending time with them, sensing their energy, and naming them, experimenting with them, and practicing them; in short, through experiencing them and embracing them as if we were in the kitchen engaged in cooking. In a sense, it is learning from the inside out.

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Full comprehension comes through marrying the conceptual and the experiential. And *knowing about* emotions can help us *know* emotions. This book presents ideas, concepts, and models that if adopted will allow you to experience your relationship with emotions in a new way. However, without creating experiences that include the emotions themselves, you risk only *learning about* emotions. This is, of course, true for learning anything deeply and completely, but because of our tendency to believe we are rational beings, we often fall into the limiting belief that knowing *about* a thing is the full story. With emotions it definitely is not. From this writing you can gain a large amount of cognitive understanding, but you will need to commit time to emotional experiences and reflection in order to gain a broader understanding of this domain.

Is it like? Or is it love?

When I lead group intuitive painting workshops, I witness people often get trapped by the need to like their painting. If they don't like their painting, they feel as if they have failed—done something wrong. In Dan's conference on emotions I experienced him making beautiful distinctions as to what it means to "like" something in life. He described how attachment to liking often produces a closed view in the world and how the emotion of love is often the one we are seeking or needing. I was in awe of how Dan was able to take people through this incredibly powerful territory without a paintbrush in his hands.

—J.C.

From frustration to calm

My realization came during a class I was required to attend as part of my work. I remember it like it was yesterday. I now know I was in the emotion of anger. I was dealing with my mother's death three months before. My father was in deep depression; his emotions changed by the hour, and he was drinking like a fish. My wife was not happy with the amount of time I was spending with him. My supervisor was the most difficult person I had ever worked for. The pressure for me was at its max. The next thing I knew, I was told I had to go to a class so I could learn a better way to communicate with colleagues, and that it would help me in my personal life. For me, this just made no sense at all. I was already behind in my job, and now I had to take three days to go "play" with my emotions. I was exhausted and I was angry that I didn't have a choice about going to a class I didn't want to attend.

The first morning I tried to block out the facilitator's voice. After lunch we started to talk about what emotions were and how we could understand them in a useful way. It was in that moment that I really started listening. The following day we went deeper into specific emotions. Wow, did I learn why my emotions were always frustration and anger. I learned how the emotion I chose to communicate from with other people made all the difference, and that was the day my life changed forever. I learned so many

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ways to be a positive leader, and how the human mind and emotions work in a practical way. Now I always think about what emotion I'm in before I answer any questions or make a decision. One major change for me is that I don't suffer from panic attacks anymore. Somehow, knowing that emotions are normal and just trying to tell me what is happening to me has made life much calmer and less scary. I never could have imagined it.

—L.Z.

Chapter 2

A NEW INTERPRETATION

All human beings share certain fundamentals. Breathing is something all humans do. Taking food for nourishment is another. Sleep is a third. These are aspects of being human that to some degree we have the power to choose *how* or *when* to do, but we do not get to choose *if* we will do them. Beyond these, there are other core aspects of being human that we sometimes overlook. One of these is that all human beings have emotions. Emotions are not discretionary. That is to say, we do not get to choose whether or not we will have emotions. We **are** emotional beings just as we are also rational beings. Although we individually relate to and express emotions differently, depending on our character, culture, and experiences, that doesn't change the fact that we all have emotions.

Fundamental to understanding what we are suggesting is that all of your beliefs about what emotions are and how they work are interpretations. They may be interpretations supported by research and experimentation. You may have accumulated data to “prove” that the belief you are proposing is the one and only truth, but if you dig deep enough, you will see that your belief is a particular interpretation of emotions. What we, the authors, are offering is simply another interpretation of the phenom-

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enon of emotions. We are not claiming it is true, but we are endorsing it as useful and practical. Our years of experience as coaches, teachers, facilitators, and consultants have shown us that lacking a useful interpretation of emotions hampers our ability to engage in life in many ways. It makes us less effective in most things we do. It's often a source of confusion, because when we believe that humans are only rational beings, any event that cannot be explained rationally cannot be explained. Therefore it is not understandable within the boundaries we have created with our habitual way of thinking.

If you go to the dictionary for a definition of what an emotion is, you will generally find two statements: "An emotion is a feeling" or "An emotion is an affective state of consciousness." While both may have validity, neither definition is particularly helpful for understanding what emotions are, what role they play in our lives, what it might mean when we experience them, or how to navigate them. The ontological interpretation of the emotional domain allows emotions and moods to be understood as useful tools in daily life.

In the ontological interpretation, an emotion is what the etymology of the word suggests: *e-motion*. It is "that that puts you in motion" or "that which moves you." We all can notice the energy that urges us to move faster, change position, or say something we consider important. That energy is the emotion. In this case, "action" and "motion" are distinct from "movement." An emotion such as laziness will make lying immobile on the sofa attractive, which is its particular "predisposition to action." Emotional energy could show up as a reaction to an experience, which would be an emotion, or it could be more long-lasting, in which case we might call it a mood.

Both moods and emotions have the following specific attributes: