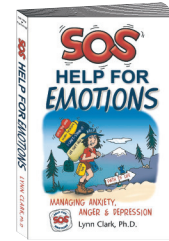


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## Chapter 1

# Achieving Contentment And Our Goals

### MEETING THE SABER-TOOTHED TIGER



Our “fight or flight response” and emotions such as fear enabled our prehistoric ancestors to survive in a dangerous world. When meeting a saber-toothed tiger, flight was usually the best response!

### *Fighting The Snake*

It was nighttime and I was crawling under my house with a flashlight, intent on moving a TV line from one room to another. Distracted by a maze of pipes, lines, and bugs, I crawled right up to a snake! I froze and panicked at seeing its two eyes, and said to myself, “*It’s a snake!*” My breathing became rapid and

my heart started pounding. As I raised my flashlight to hit the snake, I said to myself, *"If I miss the snake I'll probably break my flashlight, and then the snake and I'll be in the dark together."* I shuddered, reached for a pipe, and then struck at the snake.

My wife and son, on the floor above me and hearing the struggle, called down, *"What are you doing?"* I replied, *"I'm recovering from just killing a snake,"* to which my son yelled back, *"Be careful dad; where there's one snake, there might be more!"* Another series of chills went over me as I cautiously looked around. After assuring myself that my immediate area was free of snakes, I finished moving the TV line.

When I returned to the safety of my house, I thought about my emotion of fear and my fight or flight reaction. My emotional response to the snake was essentially the same response to dangerous situations experienced by our ancestors many ages ago.

As I thought about the snake, I also felt some regret for my actions since the snake hadn't caused our encounter. I had experienced a "fight or flight response." What was important, however, was that I now felt safe.

## **Contentment And Our Goals**

We all want to be happy and achieve our goals. However, anxiety, anger, depression, and other unpleasant emotions cause distress interfering with our contentment, health, relationships, and other life goals. The anxiety I experienced under my house almost prevented me from staying until I moved the TV line.

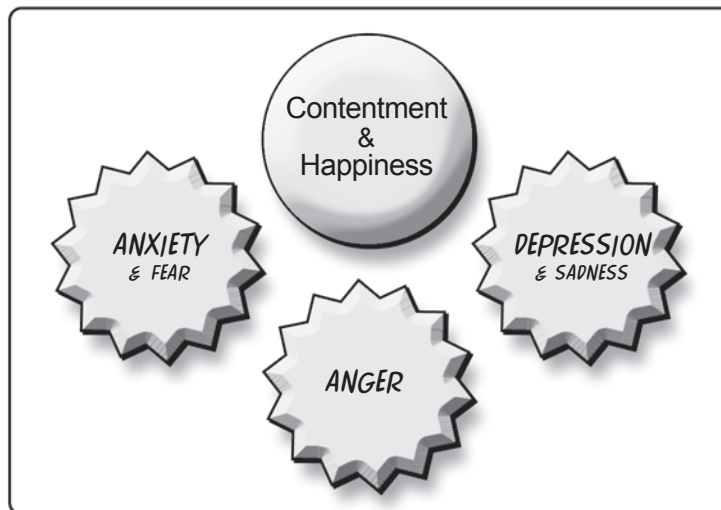
The purpose of this book is to help you to decrease and manage your anxiety, anger, and depression and to help you to increase your contentment in daily living. As a result, you can be more successful in attaining your goals, enjoying life more, experiencing better relationships, and having better health.

Unpleasant and out-of-control emotions not only reduce our pleasure in day-to-day living, but block us from attaining our goals. Unbridled emotions can also damage our health. Continuing anger and impatience can cause us to be vulnerable to a variety of cardiovascular problems. For example, a surge of anger can spike our blood pressure, causing a blood vessel to burst leading to a stroke. In many other ways, intense unpleasant emotions damage our bodies and adversely change our lives.

Individuals vary greatly in their vulnerability and response to stress. Some people experience mildly stressful events and become more upset than others who experience severely stressful events. Shortly we will be exploring why individuals differ in their emotional response to stress.

Let's examine more closely the nature of our emotions. We'll be considering contentment, anxiety, anger, and depression.

### Four Core Emotions



Our four core emotions are contentment, anxiety, anger, and depression.

## The Four Core Emotions

What are emotions? *Emotions are complex feelings with mental, physical, and behavioral components. Mentally*, we experience our emotions and feelings as pleasant or unpleasant. *Physically*, we experience them as strong awareness or tension. *Behaviorally*, we experience our feelings and emotions as an impulse to act.

When I encountered the snake, mentally I evaluated the event as unpleasant and threatening. Physically, my breathing and heart rate increased. Behaviorally, I felt a strong impulse to act: fight or flight.

Our four basic emotions are fear, anger, sadness, and enjoyment or contentment (Goleman, 1995). Sustained fear experienced in many different situations becomes anxiety. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure and antagonism. Lasting, enduring sadness becomes depression. *Contentment is a sense of well-being and pleasant feelings without much anxiety, anger, and depression.* SOS Help For Emotions focuses on these emotions of anxiety (sustained fear), anger, depression (sustained sadness), and contentment. Let's now consider emotional intelligence and how it relates to our emotions.

## Emotional Intelligence

Just as people vary in their general intelligence, they vary in their emotional intelligence. *Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage one's emotions* (Goleman, 1995).\*

High intelligence and a good education don't guarantee you control over your emotions or success in life. Intense emotions and a low frustration tolerance, if not managed well, can defeat you.

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\* Technical Talk: Emotional intelligence is closely related to wisdom, insight, and judgment. Social intelligence includes understanding others' emotions and behavior and managing relationships.

Success and recognition from his peers were central goals for John, a young Ph.D. psychologist. Emotionally vulnerable to criticism, he once became so involved in defending his research at a convention that he punched another psychologist in the nose. His defensiveness, lack of emotional control, and criticism of his colleagues and department chairperson eventually cost him his job. John is an example of a bright, well-educated person whose lack of emotional insight and poor management of emotions defeated his goals.

Poorly managing our emotions can create severe problems in our relationships. Angrily screaming, “I hate you,” to a child or other loved one damages our relationship with that person.

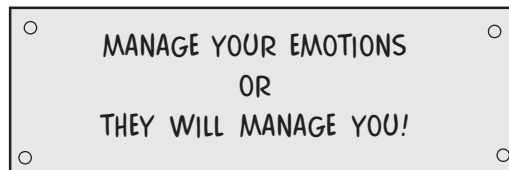
Your emotional intelligence likely contributes more to successful and enjoyable living, than your general intelligence. *Since emotional intelligence is learned rather than inherited, it can be improved.* In the following chapters, SOS teaches specific methods enabling you to better handle your emotions. Now, let’s consider the components of emotional intelligence.

Five abilities comprise our emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). These abilities include:

- Knowing our emotions
- Managing our emotions
- Recognizing emotions in others
- Managing relationships with others
- Motivating ourselves to achieve our goals

Let’s briefly look at each of these parts of emotional intelligence. The first ability, *knowing our emotions*, is self-awareness, understanding our central feelings, and being able to name our emotions. Knowing our emotions also means being aware of our silent self-talk statements and automatic thoughts accompanying our emotions and moods.

The second ability, *managing our emotions*, is highly dependent on knowing our emotions, our automatic thoughts, and our silent self-talk statements. *Learning to more effectively manage our emotions is critical in successful living and is the primary goal of SOS.* Many people attempt to soothe their emotions by overeating, drinking alcohol, taking “recreational” drugs, and overworking. These maladaptive ways to calm ourselves lead to increased emotional and relationship problems.



Effectively managing our emotions includes:

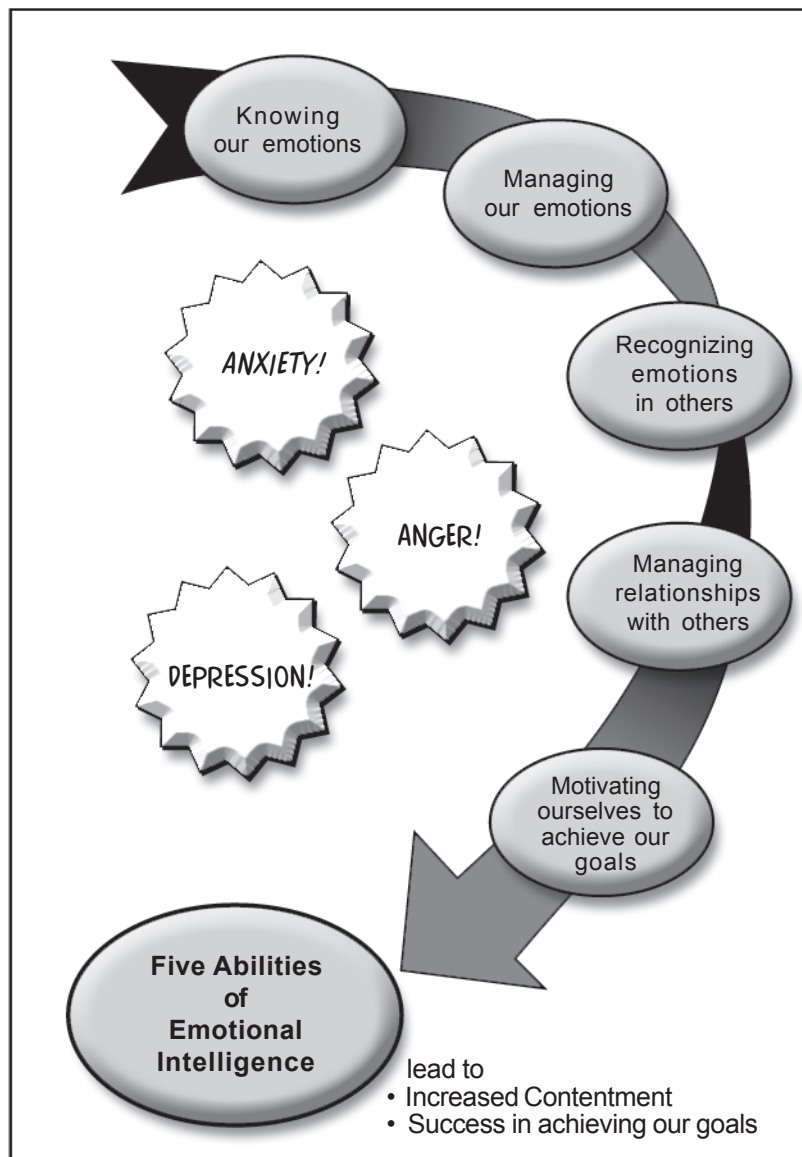
- soothing and calming ourselves when upset
- practicing self-control
- managing anger
- controlling impulses
- expressing emotions at the right time and place
- avoiding sustained anxiety, anger, and depression
- handling inevitable defeats and setbacks in life
- preventing negative emotions from dominating our judgment and problem solving

Two additional ingredients for managing our emotions, particularly important in SOS, are:

- tolerating frustration
- accepting and valuing ourselves



### Five Steps To Emotional Intelligence And Three Unhealthy Emotions To Manage



Enhance your emotional intelligence and avoid trapping yourself in the unhealthy emotions of anxiety, anger, and depression.

*Recognizing emotions in others* is the ability to read and understand another's feelings and intentions. Stephen Covey, in *The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*, advises us, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Dale Carnegie, in *How To Win Friends And Influence People*, recommends, "Be a good listener; encourage others to talk about themselves." Recognizing emotions in others depends on attentive listening and encouraging others to express their thoughts and feelings. Empathy and compassion are extensions of the ability to recognize another's feelings.

*Managing relationships with others* is the fourth part of emotional intelligence. People who excel in this ability handle relationships smoothly, connect with others, are appropriately assertive, can negotiate solutions to conflict and mutual problems, and can handle difficult people. Managing relationships is highly dependent on knowing our emotions, managing our emotions, and recognizing emotions in others.

*Motivating ourselves to achieve attainable goals* is the final part of emotional intelligence. This ability of emotional intelligence involves planning, persistence, delaying gratification, tolerating frustration, resisting impulsive behavior, recovering from defeats and setbacks in life, and finding satisfaction in current activities. Motivating ourselves to achieve our goals, of course, is dependent on knowing and managing our emotions.

### **Five Abilities Of Emotional Intelligence**

- Knowing our emotions
- Managing our emotions
- Recognizing emotions in others
- Managing relationships with others
- Motivating ourselves to achieve our goals



Job success, in our competitive and demanding economy, is increasingly related to the five abilities comprising our emotional intelligence. Initiating and successfully maintaining intimate relationships is highly dependent on our emotional intelligence as is avoiding relationships harmful to us.

### Thomas Edison's Emotional Intelligence



Thomas Edison eventually invented the electric light bulb after many years of effort and after failing 1,000 times. Which two of the five abilities of emotional intelligence did he most strongly demonstrate?

1. Knowing our emotions
2. Managing our emotions
3. Recognizing emotions in others
4. Managing relationships with others
5. Motivating ourselves to achieve our goals

For the answer to this question see the footnote on a following page.

SINCE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
IS LEARNED  
RATHER THAN INHERITED,  
IT CAN BE IMPROVED

## **The Origin Of Our Emotions**

What causes our emotions? Where do they come from? Powerful emotions enabled our prehistoric ancestors to survive in an “eat or be eaten” world. These same emotions and the brain centers housing them have been handed down genetically for countless generations. We still experience these primitive emotions even though there are no longer saber-toothed tigers in our lives.

High levels of tension, alertness, anxiety, and aggression as well as an instant fight or flight response helped our ancestors to survive saber-toothed tigers and other physical dangers. But in our modern world, without daily life and death struggles, these powerful emotions can cause problems in adapting to the world and smoothly relating to other people.

Specific primitive centers in our brain markedly influence our emotions. However, our use of language and higher brain centers can greatly influence and override our more primitive brain centers. The main influences on our emotions and behavior are thinking, our evaluation of events, and our silent self-talk statements.

Your particular genetic makeup does influence your tendency to be calm or excitable, but only to a small extent. Childhood experiences and current emotional support from people close to you help to influence your emotional calm. Various physical conditions (illness, lack of sleep, poor nutrition) can predispose you to be easily upset. However, for the vast majority of us, these factors do not significantly determine our level of contentment or freedom from anxiety, anger, or depression.

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Thomas Edison's Emotional Intelligence – In my opinion, Edison most strongly demonstrated emotional intelligence ability #5 (Motivating ourselves to achieve our goals) and #2 (Managing our emotions). He needed to manage his feelings of frustration in order to persevere in attaining his goals. Most people would have given up.

*Our emotions are largely, but not entirely, controlled by our beliefs, the way we think about problems, and our silent self-talk. If physical conditions and illness are predisposing you to experience unpleasant emotions, get medical help for those physical conditions which can be changed. Also, learn and practice the methods presented in SOS. Our irrational patterns of thinking are like bad habits; both are self-defeating and difficult to change.*



### Can Emotions Damage Our Health?

Yes! It is well accepted by physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists that stressful events, emotional distress, and our evaluation of unpleasant events profoundly affect our health (Gatchel & Blanchard, 1993; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Psychological factors can initiate or intensify physical damage to our body.\* The damage can be temporary or permanent. However, there are many reports of people recovering from certain kinds of serious illnesses by altering their mental outlook and emotional state.

What is stressful for one person might not be stressful for another. As we'll learn in the next chapter, our interpretation and evaluation of unpleasant events will primarily determine how emotionally upsetting those events are.

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\*In *Emotional Intelligence* (1995, pp. 324-328), Goleman lists a number of studies on mind and medicine. Anxiety, anger, and depression can lead to a wide variety of physical disorders.

How can emotional stress harm our bodies? Emotional stress can cause increased muscle tension leading to teeth grinding, tension headaches, and other kinds of muscle pain. Blood vessel spasms in the brain can cause migraine headaches.

Anger and fear cause substances to be released into our blood which increase the chance of clots forming. Receiving bad news can raise blood pressure to dangerous levels. Increased blood pressure and blood which clots quickly helped our prehistoric ancestors survive encounters with saber-toothed tigers. However, in our modern sedentary world, increased blood pressure and quickly clotting blood endanger our health. Physical processes which once helped our ancestors to survive can kill us.

Emotional turmoil can suppress our immune system, causing us to suffer from viral and bacterial infections. Stress can cause changes in the lining of the nose, throat, sinuses, and lungs leading to frequent or chronic infections. Several types of skin rash and hair loss have psychological causes.

Emotional distress can stimulate the stomach to secrete too much acid which can lead to heartburn and gastritis. Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation can be brought on by emotional problems. It is well-known that eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia have psychological causes.

Poor understanding and management of our emotions can undermine our contentment, relationships, and goals as well as harm our health. Use SOS to help you to better manage your emotions and life!

○ YOU CAN'T MANAGE RELATIONSHIPS ○  
UNTIL  
YOU MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS ○

## Poorly Managed Anxiety, Anger, And Depression Contribute To Emotional Problems And Disorders



### ANXIETY!

#### Anxiety related problems and disorders:

generalized anxiety disorder  
panic attacks and disorders  
a•gor•a•pho•bia  
social phobia  
social anxiety disorder  
specific phobias  
obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)  
obsessions, compulsions  
hy•po•chon•dri•a•sis  
adjustment disorder with anxiety

#### Anger related problems and disorders:

anger at self, others, or the world.  
short temper, snapped, went off on  
rage reactions  
defensiveness, irritableness  
conduct disorder  
oppositional defiant disorder  
intermittent explosive disorder




### ANGER!



### DEPRESSION!

#### Depression related problems and disorders:

clinical depression  
dys•thy•mic disorder  
major depressive disorder  
bipolar disorder (also called manic-depressive)  
cy•clo•thy•mic disorder  
adjustment disorder with depression  
low self-esteem, low self-acceptance



### ANXIETY ANGER & DEPRESSION

Problems-in-living often result from mixtures of high levels of anxiety, anger, depression and and from various other factors. Common problems include: conflict in relationships (job, family, parenting), eating disorders, substance abuse, sleep disorder, procrastination, low frustration tolerance, resistance to being responsible for one's self and family.

**Main Points To Remember:**

- Anxiety, anger, depression, and other unpleasant emotions cause mental and physical distress and can interfere with our contentment, health, relationships, and goals in life.\*
- For successful and enjoyable living, our emotional intelligence (understanding and managing our emotions) matters more than our general intelligence.
- Since emotional intelligence is learned rather than inherited, it can be improved.
- Job success in our competitive and demanding economy is increasingly related to the five abilities comprising our emotional intelligence.
- Our thinking, personal evaluation of events, and silent self-talk statements mainly control our emotions and behavior.
- The goal of SOS is to help you manage your anxiety, anger, depression, and other emotions so that you are both more contented and successful in attaining your goals.

○ LISTEN TO WHAT PEOPLE TELL YOU. ○  
○ LISTEN CLOSELY TO WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF! ○

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\* *The Merck Manual Of Medical Information: Second Home Edition* at <[www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual](http://www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual)> is my favorite book and website for information on health problems and treatments. The website is a valuable free resource, although somewhat technical. For information on a variety of medications go to <[www.drugdigest.org](http://www.drugdigest.org)>.