

Executive Coaching for Emotionally Intelligent Leadership



# Eagle Alliance Executive Coaching, LLC

William R. Murray, MBA, M.Div.

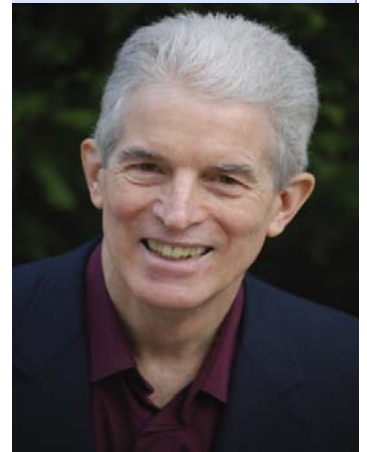
BOOK CHAPTER

*“Emotional Intelligence for Resilience:  
How to know what you really want  
and stay focused on it”*

From the book, *Upping the  
Down Side*, an Amazon Books  
best seller.

[www.EagleAlliance.com](http://www.EagleAlliance.com)

Copyright © 2010 by William R. Murray/Eagle Alliance Executive Coaching, LLC. All rights reserved.



William R. Murray  
Harvard MBA, Yale M.Div., MCC  
[bmurray@eaglealliance.com](mailto:bmurray@eaglealliance.com)

CEO of Eagle Alliance Executive  
Coaching, LLC

919-419-9460  
8 Wexford Drive, Durham, NC  
27713

Two capabilities of emotional intelligence are clarity of intention and collaboration.

Having clarity of intention and collaborating with others results in more energy and resourcefulness. And that means more resilience in the face of problems, change, and turbulence. Resilience means we can handle turbulence and bounce back.

To be resilient and resourceful, we need to ask ourselves in each new situation:

- What do I really want? Or,
- What matters?
- What is important?
- What values do I want to preserve in this situation?

Knowing our answers at a deep level gives us great energy to be resilient—to deal with life’s setbacks. Usually our first answer is not the final word. We need to dig deeper.

## **Dig deeper: A story**

For example, a woman in a workshop of mine, *Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals*, said, “What I want is for my teenage daughter to clean up her room. It’s horrible!”

I coached her to ponder what she really wanted. I said, “OK, then here is how you can get that wish to come true. Give your daughter all sorts of cleaning equipment, lock her in her room, and tell her she cannot come out until the room is clean.”

The woman was shocked. “Oh, I couldn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Because she would hate me. She would be angry with me for months.”

“OK,” I replied, “then you must want something else in addition to a clean room. What is that?”

The woman pondered and said, “I also want to keep a good relationship with her.”

“Well, then you could hire someone to clean the room,” I replied.

“No, no. That won’t do either.”

“Why not?”

“Because I want her to learn to take responsibility for cleanliness. She needs to learn to do that before she leaves home in two years for college.”

“Now you have dug deeper into what you really want,” I summed up. “You want three things:

- A clean room,
- A good relationship with your daughter,
- Your daughter to learn to take responsibility for cleanliness.”

The woman grew excited, “Yes, yes, that’s it!”

## Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence means that you know what you really want, at a deeper level than your first inclination. In this situation, for example, the woman really valued cleanliness and wanted her daughter to learn to share her value. You can see from her excitement that this process of digging deeper energized her. After that, she had more energy to craft strategies to get what she really wanted.

A simple strategy often will not get you what you really want. You must be resourceful. When you dig deeper, new alternatives will come to mind. *Knowing what you really want at a deeper level makes you more resourceful and resilient.*

## Collaboration

One way to be resourceful is to ask the other person what they really want and help them to dig deeper. For example, the woman could ask her daughter what she really wants. Maybe the daughter needs a sense of independence and control over her environment. Meanwhile, if the daughter senses that her mother genuinely desires to meet not only her own needs, but also those of her daughter, she will be more likely to join her mother in brainstorming for solutions—strategies to meet both of their needs.

If the mother can create a sense that both of them are a team facing this problem of cleanliness, success is more likely. Your ultimate success in difficult situations will depend on whether you can keep both your needs and the other person’s in mind and seek strategies that satisfy both of you.

## Clarity of intention

The principle here is that you have the most energy if you work in alignment with what you really want. Keep asking yourself what you really want and dig deeper in each situation. Then you will be energized and resourceful in finding strategies to get what you really want and in collaborating so that the other person gets what they want too.

Knowing what you really want is a form of emotional intelligence needed to face changes, complexity, ambiguity, and turbulence in your workplace and in the world. In his book *Coach2 the Bottom Line*, Mike Jay asserts: "One of the most critical roles of a leader is centered in establishing clarity of intention." If you are a leader of your company, you must know what you really want. Then you can set goals accordingly and plan appropriate actions.

When turbulence blows you off course, you can correct your course by remembering what you really want. If you have clarity of intention, you have a sense of direction no matter what happens.

## Mission statement

Clarity of intention is important in both big-picture and small-picture views. The big picture is about your true values that guide your life. The small picture is about what you want in a given situation, such as the above example on cleanliness. Ideally, you should get clear about the big picture values so that they inform what you want in daily situations. A good way to get clear about the big picture is to write a personal mission statement.

I wrote my personal mission statement years ago, and it has kept me focused. I refer back to it to remind myself of my deeper values so that I express them in daily challenges. For example, a deep value in my personal mission statement is to help people develop professionally. Sometimes doing that may pull a person out of their comfort zone, and they may react negatively. Then I remind myself of my value and stay the course, but possibly with a different approach. This gives me a sense of integrity, which is another goal in my mission statement.

I noticed years ago that people don't seem to get around to writing their personal mission statement. Since then I have coached over one hundred people through writing their own personal mission statement. All have been energized by the process. Some have told me later on that they kept on referring to their personal mission statement and were able to stay focused on their major goals. They were performing better as a result.

Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, advocates strongly for writing a personal mission statement. I have twice attended long workshops sponsored by Covey Associates. The workshop leader asked us each time to raise our hand if we had written our personal mission statement. In each workshop, I was the only one who had written one. I was shocked. Covey's book gives so many good reasons for doing this. Why would someone sign up and pay for these workshops if they had not done this? The workshop leader guided us through writing our personal mission statement right then and there.

The personal mission statement is crucial for the big picture. I believe, however, that other forms of detailed planning are a matter of personal preference. Some people like more detailed goals and action steps planned out in advance. They make a plan and work the plan. Others prefer to stay flexible and react to needs in the moment. Either way may be more effective for a given person or in a certain work environment. Some work environments require a lot of planning. Others require fast shifting around. Some require both at different times.

## Clarifying process: story of John and Bob

I have coached dozens of leaders and professionals through this process of clarifying what they really want, to have clarity of intention. Here is another example.

A client of mine, let's call him John, was angry that his colleague, Bob, kept bringing in a report late. John had to take numbers from Bob's report every Thursday and put them into a report that he gave to the president on Friday. The president used John's report to write a memo he sent out every Monday. Because Bob was late, John often had to work all Thursday night to get his report ready for the president. Being late with the president was not an option.

I asked John, "What have you done to date with Bob?"

John replied, "I keep telling him to get his blankety blank report in on time! He says OK, but a week or two later, he is back to being late."

Bill: "What do you really want here?"

John: "To get the report on time."

Bill: "Then why don't you complain to the president?"

John: "Because Bob and I work together on lots of other things, and I don't want to get him riled up and uncooperative."

Bill: So, in addition to getting the report on time, you want to keep a good working relationship with Bob, right?"

John: "Yes, that's right. So I keep my frustration to myself."

Bill: "Is there anything else you really want?"

John: *Ponders.* “Yes, for Bob to take responsibility for himself and not make me have to keep reminding and pushing him. For him to value timeliness and teamwork, just as I do.”

Bill: “OK, you have now named three things you want in this situation:

- The report on time,
- A good working relationship with Bob,
- For Bob to take responsibility.”

Anything else?”

John: “No, that’s it.”

Bill: “In that case, you are in a better position to look for strategies that will get you what you really want. If you had settled for just number one, the report on time, your strategy would be flat, not good enough to get you two and three. Now call on your resourcefulness to craft a comprehensive strategy.”

John: “Seems like a tall order. I don’t have any great ideas.”

Bill: “Want me to help? Two heads are better than one.”

John: “Yes, indeed.”

Bill: “What I recommend is to get Bob involved. You need to invite him to help solve this problem. I could assist you in setting this up and be present for your meeting with Bob. I think I can help you collaborate to come to a good outcome.”

John: “Great idea. So you can kind of mediate this?”

Bill: “Exactly. I’ll strive to have you each go for a win/win, to see what the other really wants and try for strategies that give you both what you really want. Can you do that? Ask what he really wants and keep that in mind, too?”

John: “Yes, I like collaboration. We are, after all, on the same team. These reports are important to both of us.”

Bill: “Good. I think we can get a discussion in which you both see each other as on the same team trying to solve a problem of timeliness. I expect that three heads are better than two. We should be able to increase our resourcefulness and find a good strategy that meets both your needs.”

As a result of this discussion, these two were able to see together that an organizational problem was causing Bob to be late, not any personal problem of Bob’s. Then they went to the correct person to solve that problem. A new computer system was developed that produced the needed information faster and satisfied both men’s needs.

I have helped several clients through this process of clarifying what you really want and collaborating with others to get it.

## **Collaborative process summary**

1. Know what you really want.
2. Dig deeper.
3. Ask the other person what they really want.
4. Collaborate with them to find strategies for you both to get what you want.

Having clarity of intention and collaborating with others results in more energy and resourcefulness. And that means more resilience in the face of problems.

## **Stay focused on what you really want**

Unfortunately, problems, stress, and turbulence sometimes get us upset so that we temporarily forget what we really want. Then we shift to some lesser goal instead. Therefore, we need to consider what to do when turbulence blows us off course and things do not go as planned.

In the above case, for example, what if Bob says to John, “I don’t have time for any such meeting. I told you I would get that report in on time. So get off my back!” John might lose sight of what he really wants. He might shift to the goal of letting off steam to express his anger at Bob. He might fire a zinger at Bob, “You’re not a team player. You are just out for yourself!” Later, John might regret what he said. Lack of impulse control has been cited as the number one problem leaders are coached to improve. So what would I coach John to do here?

## Impulse control

I might start with some facts about impulse control. We humans have a biological problem. For most of our species' existence, life was relatively simple. One of our most important challenges was to react very quickly to any threats of physical danger, in order to stay alive. We were and are equipped with a part of the brain called the amygdala that reacts very quickly to danger. In the past, if someone saw a tiger, the amygdala sprang into action, sending blood to the legs to run and the arms to fight.

The blood is taken from the brain. You see, the brain has done its job. It recognized danger. Now the limited supply of blood must be channeled to legs and arms. This is what gets us into trouble today—lack of blood in the brain at a crucial moment in a conversation. When someone says or does a dumb thing, we may say, “He lost his head.” Right, the brain is not functioning well in many stressful situations because it lacks blood.

The fight-or-flight syndrome helped people when the crucial choice was simple. All someone had to do was spot something and determine if they should fight it or flee from it. Fast reactions saved their life. But today this same amygdala gets you into trouble in the office. It may save your life if you step off the curb in front of a truck. You see the truck and your amygdala will take over and cause you to jump back onto the curb. No thinking is involved. Only reacting.

But in the office this fast reacting often spells trouble. It might spell trouble if John reacts without thinking to an unwelcome comment from Bob. Now what can we do about this reaction problem? When stress has made you reactive, here are some ways to recover yourself.

## Recovery Process

1. Train yourself to notice your physical symptoms of being upset, such as: tense muscles, shallow breathing, heart racing, face flushed, making fists, perspiring, tightness in chest, etc. These sensations tell you that you are reacting and it is time to get your focus back.
2. Calm yourself with techniques such as deep breathing and meditating.
3. Remember to ask yourself the question, “What do I really want?” This asking a question will make your brain come back into action, and more blood will flow into it so it can work on the question.
4. If necessary, take time out. Say you will come back later.

We have less resourcefulness when stress gets us off course, especially if the amygdala takes over at the wrong times. Try the above ways of staying focused on what you really want, and invent your own.



## A Story of an Executive

Here is a true example of this recovery process. An executive I'll call Sam joined a company. After some months, he noticed that he was being left out of key meetings that he should be in. He wondered what had gone wrong. Sam asked for a meeting with four people that he hoped would tell him.

Sam was clear about what he really wanted from this meeting - feedback about what he had done to be left out of these meetings. He confided that he was concerned about being left out and asked for their frank feedback. Silence followed. Then one woman blurted out, "It's because you're a backstabber!" Sam reacted strongly. He almost got out of his chair to challenge the woman and set her straight. Then he noticed how hard he was gripping his chair arms. White knuckles showed.

He realized that he was upset and angry. He decided to calm himself down before he said anything. He breathed deeply several times. He pondered what to say as all eyes watched him. He remembered his initial goal of getting feedback and got focused back on that. Finally, he said, "I must have done something to make people believe that. Can you tell me what I did?" The woman calmly told him.

This executive noticed his plight - that he had forgotten what he really wanted. He relaxed and got refocused on his goal. Once he regained his focus, he was able to say something that got him what he really wanted, frank feedback.

## Conclusion

Use your emotional intelligence to increase resilience by knowing what you really want and staying focused on it. As we have seen, this results in more energy and resourcefulness to solve problems and bounce back when things go wrong. This works best if you involve other people in a collaborative approach to reach win/win goals.

## How to contact me

If you would like more information, please see my website, [www.EagleAlliance.com](http://www.EagleAlliance.com), and its Blog on Emotional Intelligence for Leaders. I assist leaders, business owners, and professionals to improve their performance and results, as well as their resilience. Results include powerful leadership, better decisions, increased communication, and improved work relationships, all leading to more effectiveness at work and greater profits.

To explore possibilities for becoming more resilient and getting these results, please contact me at 919-419-9460 or send an email through <http://www.eaglealliance.com/contact>. If that fails, go to the home page and click on Contact Us. This keeps your email out of my spam filter.

© Copyright 2010 by William R. Murray, Eagle Alliance Executive Coaching. All rights reserved