

## Building Resilience Through Emotionally Intelligent Practices

Christine Gravelle | Texas A&M University

Ian Lowe | Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity

Does it feel like we are, too often, putting out metaphorical fires? Staying abreast of national news while managing our campus or headquarters can seem like burning a candle at both ends. Our national landscape and the state of fraternity/sorority life seems like an inferno of change, which can lead to confusion, questions, fear, and at the same time, hope for an improved future.

Change is hard, but it is necessary. Physicist William Pollard once said, “To change is difficult. Not to change is fatal.” To navigate the necessary changes we must make as a fraternity/sorority life community, students and professionals alike need to build resilience to avoid burnout. Resilience is defined as “The ability to persevere and adapt when things go awry” (Reivich, 2012, p. 1). As we extinguish the metaphorical fires, we must strengthen our adaptability and perseverance, which demands we build emotional intelligence practices into our daily lives. Emotional intelligence (EI) is “the ability to integrate thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions” (Freedman, 2012, p. 83).

Emotional intelligence research has gained in popularity since the 1980s due to researchers including Howard Garner, Peter Salovey, John Mayer, and Daniel Goleman. Dulewicz and Higgs (2000) review of EI research studies repeatedly found EI is a critical factor in leadership and organizational effectiveness. One’s ability to manage emotions significantly impacts the performance of individuals and organizations. Yet, the idea of emotions sometimes comes with a negative reputation as something to avoid and not discuss. We cannot deny humans have emotions. In a data-informed, decision-making profession, we would be remiss if we did not recognize emotions as data. We can use this emotional data to inform our decision-making.

Although many models and frameworks of emotional intelligence exist, the Six Seconds Model (Freedman, 2012) provides a simplistic mantra to build emotional intelligence into daily practice. There are three key items to remember – *Know Yourself*, *Choose Yourself*, and *Give Yourself* (Freedman, 2012).

### Know Yourself

Self-awareness is at the heart of many leadership frameworks for a reason. It is not enough to say self-awareness is important. We must truly learn to embrace self-reflection and feedback.

Self-awareness is critical to resiliency; which means reminding ourselves that emotions are data, identifying emotional patterns, and articulating an EI common language should be incorporated into our daily lives.

Many have heard of assessments (not tests!) such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Clifton Strengths, and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, to name just a few. These common language and feedback tools can be used to reflect on who we are and why we may make our decisions. Do not misunderstand, though — these common language tools are not silver bullets for self-awareness, and they are not to be used to label and stereotype others based on their preferences. These assessment instruments can, however, provide invaluable insight and a common language if used thoughtfully and accurately. Having self-awareness is a continual cycle, and not a box to check. It takes intentionality and vulnerability to know yourself.

### **Choose Yourself**

Once EI common language and pattern recognition are identified, your emotional data can be used to make more informed decisions. You cannot know yourself if you do not take the time to choose yourself. Choosing yourself means applying consequential thinking and navigating the data (emotions) you take in about yourself and your surroundings. The goal is to gather emotional energy to fuel your choices through motivation and positivity. In our field, we often discuss the importance of well-being and the concept of work-life balance, but we are often poor role models of well-being. Rather than competing with each other on who is working harder, we need to gather our emotional energy in a more positive way to work intellectually and emotionally smarter together.

Choosing yourself requires an active process of self-reflection and critical questioning. It is identifying places and people that can assist in allowing for consequential thinking and discovering action steps. Some common examples include mindfulness training, meditation, brainstorming, and reflection in a variety of forms. You can find templates by researching Gallup's Well-Being index or Rubin's (2015) Happiness Project.

### **Give Yourself**

How can you better align daily choices with your sense of purpose and belonging? This theme is a call to action. It requires you to use self-awareness and emotional energy to make needed change. This can be scary. It requires resilience to overcome fear and insecurities and let in the vulnerability. Fears are different for everyone — introducing yourself to someone new, applying for the graduate program you have been considering, or applying for a new job. EI takes

practice. Aligning values with actions may seem easy, but how often do we lose sight of the bigger picture? This call to action encourages us to better work together and maximize strengths. As a fraternity/sorority community, we often miss opportunities to engage in action surrounding strengths. We forget to take each moment as a learning and listening opportunity.

### ***Know, choose, and give yourself***

Building EI is learned and honed through practice. In our work with the fraternity/sorority community, reminding ourselves to practice these concepts takes about six seconds. Each opportunity, whether working with students or colleagues, is an opportunity to practice. To know, choose, and give yourself, find ways to identify a common language that supports dialogue and a feedback loop with students and colleagues. Whether it is CliftonStrengths, MBTI, or whatever you choose, be consistent with the language and use it as a way to provide each other thoughtful feedback to enhance how we know ourselves and others. By knowing ourselves, we can also strengthen how we model the way and choose ourselves. As a profession, we need to choose time for reflection, hobbies, friends, and families through maximizing our time-off, rather than competing for who works the most hours. Whether it is time, an experience, or a hobby, give yourself opportunities that enrich and fulfill you. Life is too short to get caught up in the daily minutiae. Although our work is important, our well-being is even more important.

Emotional intelligence enhances our ability to stay centered, grounded, and calm when the metaphorical fires occur. To continue building civility, we all need to practice EI, give each other grace when we misstep, and be resilient and ready for change. How we lead in those crucial moments matters significantly. If “emotions drive people, and people drive performance,” as Joshua Freedman (2012) states, then for us to perform as professionals we need to intentionally invest in our emotional intelligence.

---

### **Christine Gravelle**

Christine Gravelle serves as the Director for the Department of Student Activities at Texas A&M University, in which she is responsible for the oversight of seven offices, including fraternity/sorority life. She is working on her Ph.D. in Comparative and International Education from Lehigh University. Christine is passionate about leadership development and emotional intelligence, and uses this passion to facilitate workshops domestically and internationally. Christine is a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) facilitator and restorative practices

train-the-trainer through the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP). Christine is a member of Alpha Sigma Tau Sorority.

**Ian Lowe**

Ian Lowe serves as the Executive Director for Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity. He earned his bachelor's degree in Adolescent & Young Adult Education at Baldwin Wallace and his master's degree in Educational Leadership from Lehigh University. Ian has been on Pi Lambda Phi's staff since 2008 and has worked within Chapter Services, Expansion, and Alumni Development. He has been leading Pilam's staff since 2010 and helped develop the fraternity's new strategic plan. He is also an officer and 14-year veteran of the United States Air Force. Emotional Intelligence is a passion of Ian's, and EI training is a key component of staff training and development within Pi Lambda Phi.

## References

- Dulewicz, V., & Higgs, M. (2000). Emotional intelligence. A review and evaluation study. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 15*(4), 341–372.
- Freedman, J. (2012). *At the heart of leadership: How to get results with emotional intelligence* (3rd ed.). Freedom, CA: Six Seconds.
- Reivich, K., & Shatte, A. (2002). *The resilience factor*. New York: Broadway Books.