HAVING GREAT KNOWLEDGE of the latest approaches to treatment and an encyclopedic knowledge of illness and injury is certainly beneficial to the athletic trainer. Intellectual capabilities clearly relate to clinical proficiency, but emotional intelligence may be far more beneficial to the athletic therapist day in and day out. The term emotional intelligence first appeared in the 1980s and was brought to prominence by Goleman in the 1990s. The concept relates to one’s understanding of emotion and the use of this knowledge during interpersonal relationships. Most individuals understand the value of “bedside manner” in terms of a patient’s confidence in a clinician and compliance with a treatment plan. Building a trusting and understanding relationship with a patient clearly facilitates treatment success. Furthermore, athletic trainers often work as part of a team, coordinating treatment with other healthcare professionals and communicating with a coaching staff. Hearing what others communicate, understanding their cares and concerns, and monitoring one’s own effect are necessary skills. Emotional intelligence is an attribute that improves communication and helps teams to function in a cohesive manner. The purpose of this report is to relate the benefits of emotional intelligence in the world of athletic training.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

There are two key factors that are associated with emotional intelligence: (a) the recognition and understanding of emotions, and (b) acting on this knowledge to manage one’s own emotions and relationships with others. Emotional intelligence is not a self-centered construct. It requires an individual to fully appreciate the subtle dance of feelings and perceptions that occurs between two or more people. To navigate the emotional dialogue between the athletic therapist and an athlete or professional colleague, four core skills should be nurtured:

1. Self-awareness—the understanding one’s own emotions and responses to certain situations and people;

2. Self-management—the monitoring and modifying of emotional reactions to most effectively fit each situation and relationship;
3. Social awareness—the ability to assess and understand the feelings of others; and

4. Relationship management—using understandings of one’s own and others’ emotions to communicate most effectively and for management of conflict.\(^3\)

These skills can be analyzed by reflections or actions and by self-focused or socially-focused criteria (Table 1). Unlike intellectual capabilities, which are not very malleable, emotional intelligence can be enhanced. With patience and practice, an athletic trainer can improve emotional intelligence and the associated skills.\(^4\)

### Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

The benefits of a high level of emotional intelligence in the athletic training work environment are numerous. Superior job performance is directly related to emotional intelligence in professions that emphasize the importance of building and nurturing personal relationships.\(^5\) The athletic trainer who appreciates an athlete’s apprehension about the process of restoring preinjury physical capabilities is most likely to display the understanding necessary to give the athlete confidence for his or her return to competition. Those high in emotional intelligence are most responsive to unexpected dilemmas in the workplace and most flexible.\(^6\) An example is the athletic trainer who skillfully navigates the demands and pressures of a coaching staff that is frustrated by the bad luck of numerous injuries to team members over the course of a losing season. Efficient problem solving and relationship management is the mark of an emotionally intelligent athletic trainer. Ultimately, those who embrace the process of understanding and managing his or her feelings and those of others find the greatest professional satisfaction. The athletic trainer who makes the effort to appreciate emotions when interacting with others in the clinical environment will have greater professional success and enjoyment.

### Increasing Emotional Intelligence

Increasing emotional intelligence begins with self-reflection, followed by careful observation and assessment of one’s environment, and culminates with deliberate actions and the practice of skills. Self-reflection can begin by completing an emotional intelligence inventory. Such a measure will quantify an individual’s strengths and weaknesses in the four critical areas. A wide variety of assessments can be found online, but a measure that has been documented to be valid and reliable will be most useful. Monitoring one’s reactions in emotional situations is a starting point for developing greater self-awareness. Awareness of thoughts and physiological responses in a variety of situations allows one to more clearly recognize factors associated with calmness, excitability, or improved focus. It is often helpful to keep a journal of thoughts, emotions, and actions to get a clear picture of emotions in action.

Similarly, social awareness requires careful observation and listening. The athletic trainer or therapist who takes a few moments each day to observe the athletic training clinical environment and make mental notes of energy level and attitudes can gain great insights into how others’ feelings influence communication and rehabilitation effectiveness. Furthermore an astute athletic trainer takes the time to ask questions and learn about how others perceive challenges, successes, and athletic experiences. An appreciation of the clinical environment in which one works, and how emotions can facilitate or inhibit healing relationships, are necessary for development of emotional intelligence.

Self-management requires action. It necessitates purposeful allocation of time to think through challenges associated with the process of managing an athlete’s injury and the fears and frustrations that accompany it. The simplest way to accomplish this goal is to make a habit of slowing down prior to taking action or speaking in critical situations. This can be facilitated by taking a deep slow breath or by counting to five before acting. Effective self-management lays the foundation for successful relationship management.

The most difficult skill associated with emotional intelligence is relationship management. The key is

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<tr>
<th>Table 1 Core Skills of Emotional Intelligence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
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<td>Self-Focused</td>
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<td>Socially-Focused</td>
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