

Emotional Maturity

By Tish Vincent

Emotional maturity is a topic of consideration for teachers and professors, because there is a marked difference between mature and immature students. Adults ordinarily strive to attain emotional maturity, and we allow time for young people to develop it. Becoming a mature young person takes time and guidance from a mature adult.

We all have encountered emotionally immature adults. These individuals can be frustrating to deal with or destructive in their relationships. They can also be destructive to organizations if they gain power and have control over decisions that affect other people.

The qualities of a mature person were outlined in an article in *Psychology Today*.¹ Striving to be a mature person is a worthy goal; we also need some guidelines to recognize the maturity level of others.

A mature person is able to keep long-term commitments

We all have personal and professional commitments. We display our level of maturity in our pattern of satisfying those commitments. Do we get to work on time? Do we finish projects for which we are responsible? Do we pay our bills? Do we contact our creditors to work out a payment plan if we suffer unexpected financial setbacks?

If we pledge a certain amount to charity, do we make consistent contributions to honor our pledge? Do we work on our primary relationship and take responsibility for our contributions to conflicts that exist? Do we prioritize time with our children and grandchildren? Do we communicate with people in our personal lives about our needs and wants? Do we enter mutually beneficial personal relationships, or do we

choose relationships based on what others can do for us?

A mature person is unshaken by flattery or criticism

We all have unique personalities. Some people will like us; others will not. Some may pretend to like us to get something they want from us. Some will dislike us no matter what we do. Some will agree with us; others will disagree.

A mature person rests quietly in his or her own sense of self. A mature person does not need to attack an opponent or adversary. A mature person respects an opponent's right to disagree and live life differently. When we observe someone calling an opponent names or threatening harm, we know we are listening to an immature personality. Small children do this when thwarted. By adolescence, most children have learned this is unacceptable behavior.

A mature person possesses a spirit of humility

Small children are narcissistic by nature. Their brains are primitive and they cannot perceive the complexity of life and the people who populate it. Hopefully, they can trust that their parents are benevolent and will provide warmth, food, affection, clean surroundings, and love. Small children must

have their dependency needs met in order to grow into adults capable of knowing they are not the most important people in the world.

A mature person's decisions are based on character, not feelings

We tell adolescents that their choices should be based on what is right and not on their desires or what others are doing. The same is true for mature adults. Maturity requires us to not give in to immediate feelings of anger, or insult or lash out at someone who hurts us. We give it time, keep our own counsel, and discuss our feelings with a trusted person who can listen and support us in crafting a mature response. Our character demonstrates that we understand human nature and do not become enraged when someone criticizes us.

A mature person expresses gratitude consistently

Life is challenging. All of us have numerous responsibilities and pressures; it is understandable to feel besieged, burdened, frustrated, and decidedly ungrateful. Upon quiet reflection, however, each of us has much to be grateful for.

In the midst of a difficult and demanding work project, we might feel sorry for ourselves and snap at our family. Or we can

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express gratitude for our career, our job, and the work project that challenges us. We can express gratitude for the people we love and who love us back. We can express gratitude for the scenery we pass on the way to work, the changing nature of the weather, or the cuteness of a kitten or family of ducks swimming in a pond. The 12-step recovery programs have a saying: "Gratitude is an attitude adjustment."

A mature person prioritizes others

Adults in responsible professional positions make a living by being of service to others. Lawyers represent individuals and businesses when problems arise and conflicts must be settled. Nurses and doctors tend to and treat the sick. Teachers instruct students. Those in public office serve the communities, municipalities, states, and nations that elected them. When people put themselves forward in a grandiose manner and claim the right to adulation because of their accomplishments, it's quite likely they are emotionally immature. They are prioritizing themselves and their outcomes above others.

A mature person seeks wisdom before acting

"[Wisdom] involves an integration of knowledge, experience, and deep understanding that incorporates tolerance for the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs. There's an awareness of how things play out over time, and it confers a sense of balance."²

Mature people in the grips of an emotional reaction know it is unwise to launch a counterattack. They may feel like lashing out, but wisdom keeps them from doing so. They habitually consult trusted advisers who help them see challenges from multiple

perspectives. When they do respond, it is with measured calm.

Conclusion

This concept of emotional maturity sounds a lot like the concept of civility in the practice of law. The topic of civility frequently arises when lawyers or judges gather. It is always worth repeating that we protect our emotional well-being and our capacity for civility by caring for ourselves and seeking help when needed.

I end this month's article with a quote from the home page of the Vancouver Bar Association: "[O]urs is a profession that has always both prided itself on civility and understood that it must be carefully fostered. In an inherently adversarial profession, it is civility that not only keeps it enjoyable... but it is a feature that can too easily fall by the wayside."³ ■



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ENDNOTES

1. Elmore, *The Marks of Maturity*, Psychology Today (November 14, 2012) <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/artificial-maturity/201211/the-marks-maturity>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed August 26, 2106.
2. Psychology Today, *All About Wisdom* <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/wisdom>>.
3. Vancouver Bar Association, *President's Message* <<https://www.vancouverbar.ca>>.

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