

# *Love in the Time of Corona:*

Navigating Uncertain  
Times with Emotional  
Intelligence, Mindfulness  
and Compassion

By Michelle Maldonado



## Love in the Time of Corona

I love historic novels; especially ones that explore the plights, triumphs, and transformation of humanity. Today, as we are both participants and witnesses to what is happening in our local and global communities, I can't help but be reminded of the Charles Dickens quote from *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness... it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

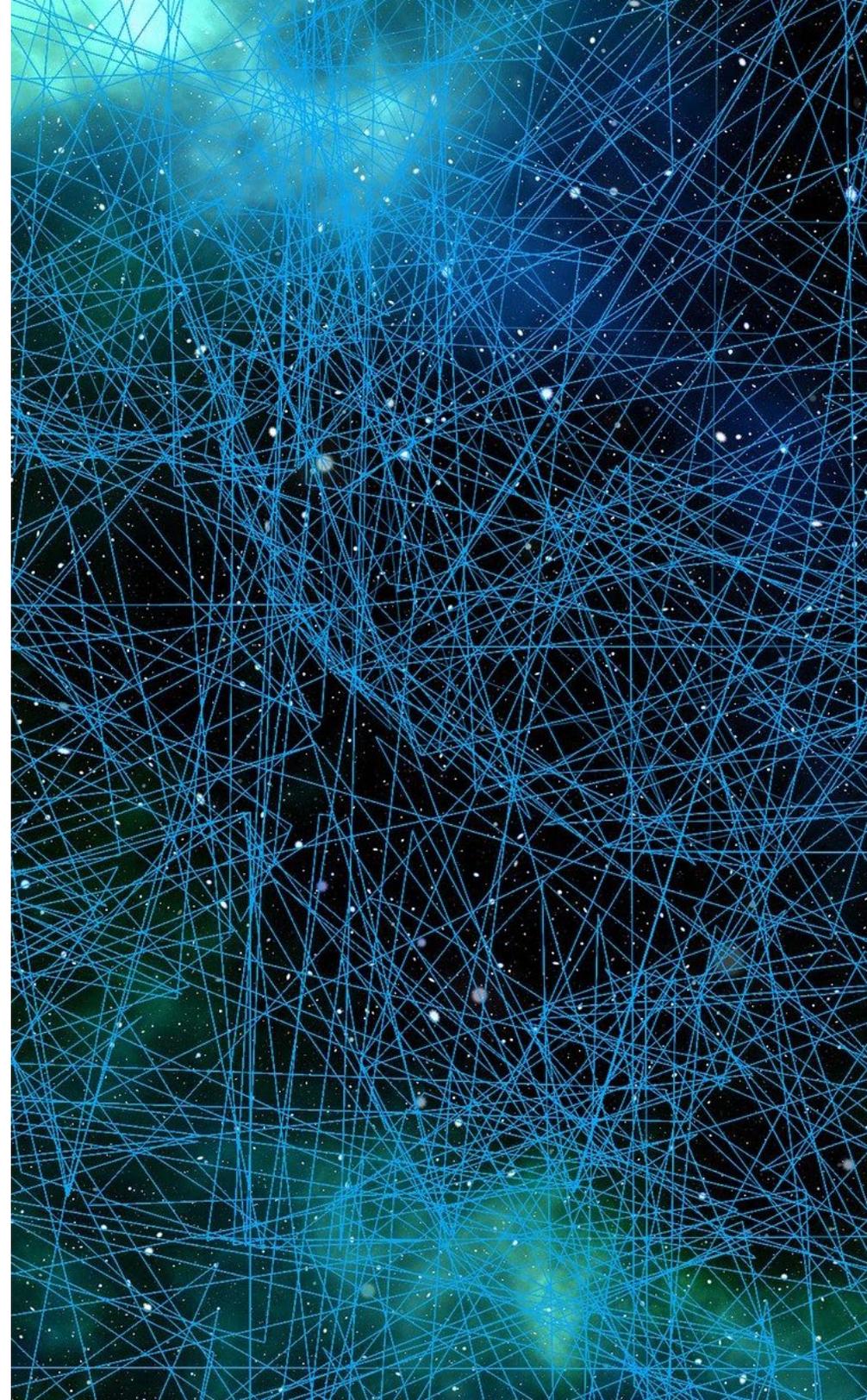
The words of *A Tale of Two Cities* ring true today as an illustration of how we experience and navigate times of strife, fear, uncertainty, and even death. The optimist in me says that our current global pandemic is an age of wisdom, a season of light, and the spring of hope, while the pragmatist in me recognizes that this time simultaneously is experienced as "a season of darkness" and "the winter of despair."

It is from this lens that I offer a few musings grounded in the framework of Emotional Intelligence at the pivotal intersection of mindfulness and compassion. By bringing these elements together in this way, we can help cultivate our capacity to more skillfully navigate these complex and uncertain times as well as extend kindness, practice compassion, take wise action... and yes, offer love, in the time of corona. I invite you to be curious and use wise discernment when considering the thoughts shared herein. Augment it. Fine-tune it so that it fits your unique and current set of circumstances – because, after all, context matters.

# Emotional Intelligence as a Vehicle

In the world of emotional intelligence (EI), there are four primary domains that make up the pillars that influence our ways of being and doing: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (grounded in empathy), and relationship management. Upon closer inspection, you will notice that these four can be broken down further into two key categories: intrapersonal skills (self-awareness and self-management) and interpersonal skills (social awareness and relationship management); the latter building upon the former.

For decades, as reflected in the deep work of Daniel Goleman, much of the conversation around emotional intelligence has focused primarily on the application of EI to enable enhanced professional [leadership and performance](#). However, the truth is that EI explained another way, can be viewed as mindfulness in action that serves as a foundation for cultivating our states of being that inform our ways of doing across our connected communities.





# Mindful Awareness as Fuel

Self-awareness is the foundational domain upon which all other EI skills are based. In the realm of self-awareness, many of us are quick to assess that we are, indeed, self-aware. However, in one research study of nearly 5,000 participants across 10,000 investigations, organizational psychologist, Dr. Tasha Eurich, noticed that of all participants asserting self-awareness, only about 15-20% were actually [self-aware](#). This deduction was based on the findings of two types of self-awareness: internal (how we view ourselves and our impact on others) and external (how other people view us) and, further, the recognition that historical conversations of self-awareness have frequently focused on practices of internal self-awareness.

Dr. Eurich's work highlights the point that internal self-awareness alone, while an important starting place, is not enough to enable our individual and collective capacities for productive interactions and healthy states of being and doing. This supports

the extension of her findings to suggest that, in order for us to move with and through our familial, social and professional circles with embodied awareness, we must consider both the what and the why of our experiences within the context of three interconnected and concentric levels of awareness: self, others, and environment.

Collectively, I refer to the foregoing as mindful awareness which can be the fuel for creating cohesion, belonging and unity for our common humanity during this global pandemic. When we embrace a broader notion of awareness and ground it in a practice of mindfulness as well as the what and they why of our experiences, we begin to peel back the cloudy layers that obfuscate our worldviews, biases, and assumptions, and help us grow seeds of [compassion](#) toward self (self-management) and others (as applied in relationship management).



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# Compassion as Lens

I have offered a multi-layered definition of compassion in a [previous article](#), so I won't spend time repeating here. In the traditional EI framework taught by Daniel Goleman, he refers to compassion as empathetic concern situated in the Social Awareness domain of the EI framework. However, regardless of which term we use, it is clear that compassion is a superpower that helps us cultivate healthy responses to our fears, counteract our natural tendencies to create in-groups and out-groups, and down-regulate our threat detection networks that are neurobiologically hardwired into our DNA.

Admittedly, there is no easy way around our current, global pandemic. The experiences of pain and suffering are as diverse as there are people and communities. For many, these times feel like a great opportunity to reconnect with and heal themselves. Indeed, there is a plethora of articles, postings, and resources proclaiming the importance of being positive, enjoying this "downtime," and resting and replenishing. However, it is equally true that, for many, this time is an anxiety-producing nightmare.

Consider those among us in [disadvantaged](#) populations who are in or on the brink of poverty; those who are experiencing further loneliness, marginalization, and moving into the shadows of our economy; those who do not have enough food or are uncertain how they will pay rent and utilities; those who live alone or in homes where there is daily abuse, neglect and more. The spectrum of truth is broad and wide. And the fear and anxiety that comes along with it, even more so.

Given our individual and collective swing across the emotional diaspora, I encourage each of us to be grateful for, but not solely rest in, the privileges we enjoy. Instead, as we manage our own feelings, behaviors, and actions, I invite us to do what we can to support others who do not enjoy the privileges so many take for granted. I invite you to ask yourselves, "how (else) may I serve?" In the words of Thuptin Junpa, "Having compassion for others frees us from fearing... it turns our attention outward, expanding our perspective, making our own problems... part of something bigger than us that we are all in together." This reminds us that we are part of a common humanity and that [true compassion takes action](#). Harkening to the words and wisdom of colleague and friend, [Dr. Belinda Chiu](#), we need to lean into and "muscularize" compassion... now.





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# Wise Action as Mode of Execution

Recently, the term “social distancing” came on the scene. While well-intentioned, it unwittingly reinforced emotions and behaviors that enhanced feelings of isolation. When I heard this term announced, I immediately rejected it believing that “physical distancing” and social connection were a healthier approach and terminology for our conditions. Just like context, words matter in the EI domain of relationship management. While it’s OK to not feel OK, we are not meant to feel lonely and isolated. In fact, it is just the opposite. We are hardwired for connection and now, more than ever, we need to rely on and connect with our social networks while keeping wise, physical distance.

For those of you who have followed my writings or heard me speak before, you’ll recall one of my favorite sayings from an October 2012 [post](#) written by Jeff Weiner: “Wisdom without compassion is ruthlessness, compassion without wisdom is folly.” I interpret this to mean that the combination of wisdom and compassion also enables us to take wise action, allowing spaciousness to move from judgment and certainty (which is a breeding ground for fear) to discernment and curiosity as we choose how we can best show up for ourselves and others.

# Daily Reminders and Resources for Connection & Well-Being

To help us navigate these times together, here are few things to remember:

- You are not alone. If you need help, please reach out. If you are feeling fine, please reach out and check on others – they might not be.
- Stay informed, but limit your time listening to the news and statistics. Mindset matters. Protect your mindset by being informed and then place your attention on the things you have control or influence over rather than that which you don't.
- Lean into creativity and explore ways to maintain or create a new normal for the work you do in the world. Perhaps you've always wanted to create a YouTube channel, an online course or podcast?
- Rest. Take purposeful pauses to give your mind and body a break from the stress of the day or as a gift to simply replenish and refuel.



- Create moments of levity. Laugh. Watch a funny movie or television show. Read or listen to a funny book. Watch stand-up comedy. We all need a mental break from time to time.
- Create a regular, daily routine that includes physical exercise, cultivation of emotional well-being (e.g., dance, journal, meditate, walk in nature, have a video or telephone call with someone, etc.), and a high nutrition diet while you work, learn and play.
- Ask yourself these questions daily:
  - How can I help? (myself and others)
  - Who can I help?
  - Who can help me?
- And, of course, wash your hands (a lot). Stay at home, if you can. If you must leave your home, keep proper physical distance and follow protective measures to keep yourself (and others with whom you come in contact) as safe and healthy as possible.

***We are in this together. May we all be well.***



### **About Michelle**

[Michelle Maldonado](#), CEO and founder of [Lucenscia](#) (pronounced loo-SENSE-see-ah), is an internationally certified emotional intelligence and mindfulness practitioner and teacher. As a former corporate and tech attorney turned business leader, she understands her clients because she has been there. Her work focuses on personal and professional leadership development at the pivotal intersection of mindfulness, emotional intelligence, authenticity, and compassion, nestled on a solid foundation of neuroscience and research to help leaders do their inner work to create positive and sustainable outer impact. [Michelle](#) is a keynote speaker, thought leader and strategist collaborating with government agencies, corporations and higher ed communities worldwide.

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