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Emotional Intelligence and Law Enforcement: A Conversation That's Long Overdue

DECEMBER 16, 2014 BY MATT SELKER 1 COMMENT

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Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner at the hands of police officers, Matt Selker shines a light on the urgent, imperative need for educating those in law enforcement on the use of emotional intelligence competencies.

The past few weeks have been very emotional for many Americans. As a nation, we have been dealing with the loss resulting from the chaos in Ferguson, Missouri and Cleveland, Ohio. In both cases, two young men lost their lives at the hands of poor choice and law enforcement. Both situations were stress-filled, chaotic events filled with stress, anxiety and riddled with poor choices.

Neurologically, we know that when a situation or environment is filled with what is called negative emotional attractors (NEA). [Our human brain is unable to innovate, process information efficiently, often resulting in lackluster outputs and/or performance](#). As Anita Howard, Ph.D. explains it in her groundbreaking research on this phenomenon, [these emotions influence adaptive change in a negative way; catalyzing a defensive response](#).

Negative emotional attractors activate the sympathetic nervous system, which helps us deal with stress and threats; it helps us protect ourselves. [It pulls us toward defensive posturing that result in the adaptive response to situations, behaviors or otherwise that threaten our safety and require us to protect ourselves.](#)

Had law enforcement involved in both scenarios identified above been more attuned or developed in their Ei competencies, they would have been positioned to interpret the high-stress situations they found themselves in and chanced identifying additional alternatives.

When this occurs, cortisol, a glucocorticoid or steroid hormone, is abundantly released in our system as it cooperates with its partner epinephrine. Among other degenerative outcomes related to excessive cortisol release, we tend to experience:

- Decrease in our peripheral vision.
- Difficulty in cognitive processing.
- Inability to handle complex tasks.
- Difficulty to think about new or possible alternatives to a situation.
- Inability to think 'outside the box.'

It goes without saying, all these characteristics are extremely important to anyone, perhaps none more important than law enforcement as they handle stressful situation daily.



Emotional intelligence (Ei) is the [ability to understand, appreciate and manage your emotions and to do the same with those around you.](#)

Dan Goleman, a leading subject matter authority, suggests emotional intelligence [refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.](#)

In summary, Ei calls on our ability to harness our emotions for use in ways that add value, as opposed to detracting value, from relationships and situations.

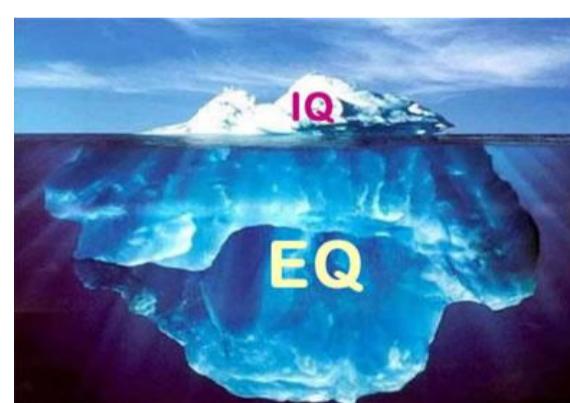
Ei includes the ability to be **self-aware** (to identify your emotions and how those emotions influence yourself, situational outcomes and others around you), **self-management** (the ability to use the emotions you're experiencing, or call on other emotions, to problem solve or think of alternative outcomes for the situation), **social-awareness** (using skills like empathy, mindfulness and more to understand the emotions of those you're interacting with or those around you) and **relationship-management** (the ability to manage the emotions of others to resolve conflict, build bonds, collaborate, influence and develop others). One of the nice things about Ei is that unlike intelligence quotient (IQ), humans are able to develop their Ei through education,

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There are multiple benefits to training law enforcement personnel in Ei; none more important than preventing situations that lead to tragic deaths.

been positioned to interpret the high-stress situations they found themselves in and chanced identifying additional alternatives.

While I will not go as far as to say ‘better alternatives’ since I was not a party to either event, I will say that had their Ei competencies been better developed, they would have mitigated the stress associated with their responses and interventions and have a greater repository of situational opportunities to select from.

There are multiple benefits to training law enforcement personnel in Ei; none more important than preventing situations that lead to tragic deaths. Training would aid law enforcement in conflict resolution. Training would also help law enforcement mitigate the impact of stress resulting from their career choice. Ei training would complement recruitment and retention strategies. Lastly, it would improve interpersonal communication within their personal and professional networks allowing improved information exchange to occur. It would aid them in becoming resonant officers or resonant leaders, attracting others to their service by becoming more ‘touchable’ which eventually improves recruitment efforts.



I suggest a national conversation at the municipal, state and federal level pertaining to law enforcement and their mandating Ei testing and/or training of prospective law enforcement candidates before hire or assignment. This practice would identify candidates lacking desirable Ei competencies and either supplement strategic training interventions or eliminate the candidacy. This practice would minimize miss-hires, thus saving their respective administrative jurisdictions scarce resources. In addition, this practice provides opportunity for candidates with higher Ei aptitude. Lastly, this practice would help rookie officers avoid early career pitfalls.

Law enforcement is responsible for delivering service to the community. The community’s responsibility, through their elected or appointed officials, is to make certain law enforcement has the capacity to handle any type of situation they may encounter in a way that yields the best possible outcome. It is our responsibility as a nation to advance the conversation about Ei and law enforcement at multiple levels to ensure these learn-able competencies becomes default behaviors and weapon discharge a distant alternative.

This conversation is long overdue.

—
Photo Credit: Associated Press/Julio Cortez

This post [originally appeared](#) on PATimes.org, a publication of the American Society for Public Administration.

In no manner is this article designed to pass judgment on any involved or take a particular side to the arguments, rather to shine light on the urgent, imperative need for educating law enforcement, and those in public safety or public service and more, on the use of emotional intelligence (Ei) competencies.

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What Happens When You Stay Single For Too Long?

Jamie Rea thinks the skills guys gain in a relationship are important – but don't worry, you won't completely destroy your chances if you're single for a long time.



Fat as Fuel

If you would've told me I would be running 3 hours on green tea for breakfast, or that I'd be riding a 100k mountain bike race for 5 and a half hours on 215 calories, or that I'd conquer the Leadville 100 MTB race in 9 hours and 45 minutes on less than 1000 calories of food, I would've said you're crazy! But that is exactly what happened.

Fathers: Redefining Roles and Relationships

In January of this year we began a series called "Portraits of Fatherhood". We asked dads to respond to ten questions about their experience as a father, including how they combine work and family, and what [Read More...]



Why No One Understands You, And What You Can Do About it

Give people the information they need, writes Craig Playstead. Otherwise, things can end very badly.

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About Matt Selker

Matt Selker is a performance-management consultant. He holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Edinboro University of PA and a master's degree in Public Administration from Cleveland State University-Levin College of Public Affairs. Selker gained his education in organizational development and change from Case Western Reserve University-Weatherhead School of Management. He can be reached via email at matt@mattselker.org.

Comments



Tee says:

December 23, 2014 at 3:06 am

This article truly hits the nail on the head. As a retired African-American female officer, who volunteered in the membership assistance program (cops helping cops), I know first hand the EVERYTHING that this article called for is 100% correct. It should be MANDATORY! The public is not aware of how an officer is



It's Time for Black Men to Be Honest About Mental Health

Men are expected to take care of and protect their families, but what about when they need help themselves?



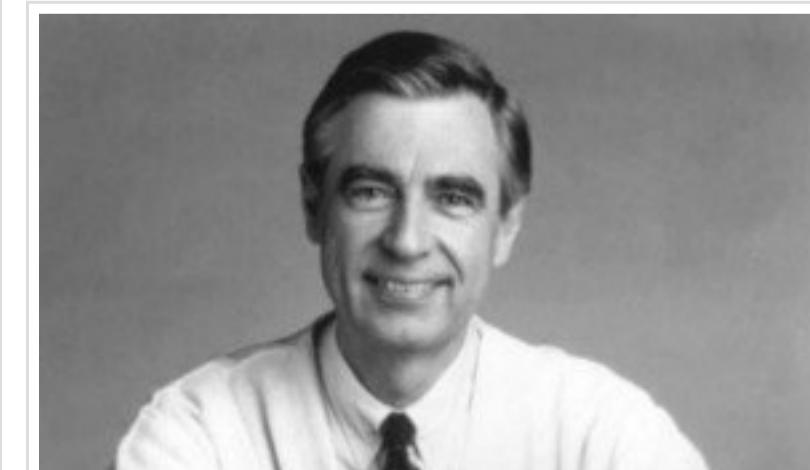
If Suicide were a Person

Quentin Lucas describes his past relationship with suicide.



On Being a 'Beautiful Boy'

There is a difference between being a beautiful boy and a handsome man. I discovered this when men would tell me as they dressed that they liked being with me, that sleeping with me felt like sleeping with a woman. Being told I was a beautiful boy was like suddenly becoming a famous child star, but knowing that your moment in the spotlight is fading fast.



Dear Dad: The One With the 'Nosy Neighbor'

After finding the home of her dreams, a reader is confronted with a nosy neighbor, a pants-dropping

humiliated before he/she leaves the station house. The superior officers need a dose of Ei checkups as well as rookie officers and police candidates. Policing has to own up to its failures, not just pay off the existing families after a tragedy has taken place. It's time for policing in the 21st century to admit to its wrongdoing and to make a change. It's better sooner than later.

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husband, and a quagmire.



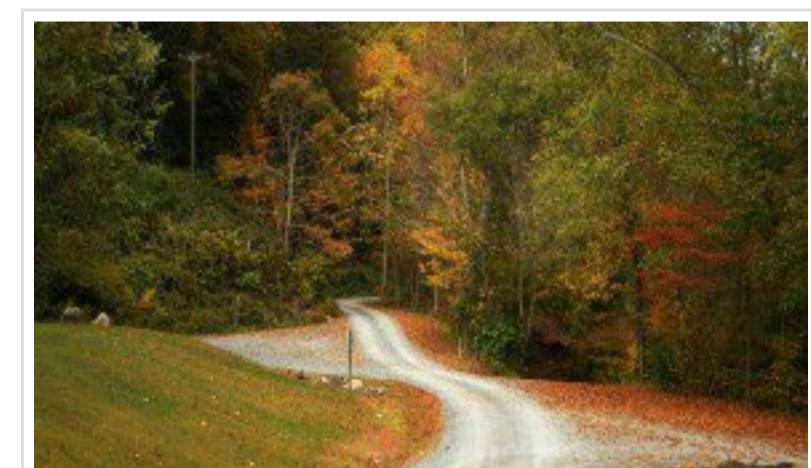
How Guys Can Talk About Money Without Being Sent to the Couch

They say experience is the best teacher. I disagree. I believe other people's experience is the best teacher.



I'm Not An Expert On Women, But...

Doyin Richards is not an expert on women, but he has some ideas on what qualities they find to be sexy in men.



The Courage To Endure

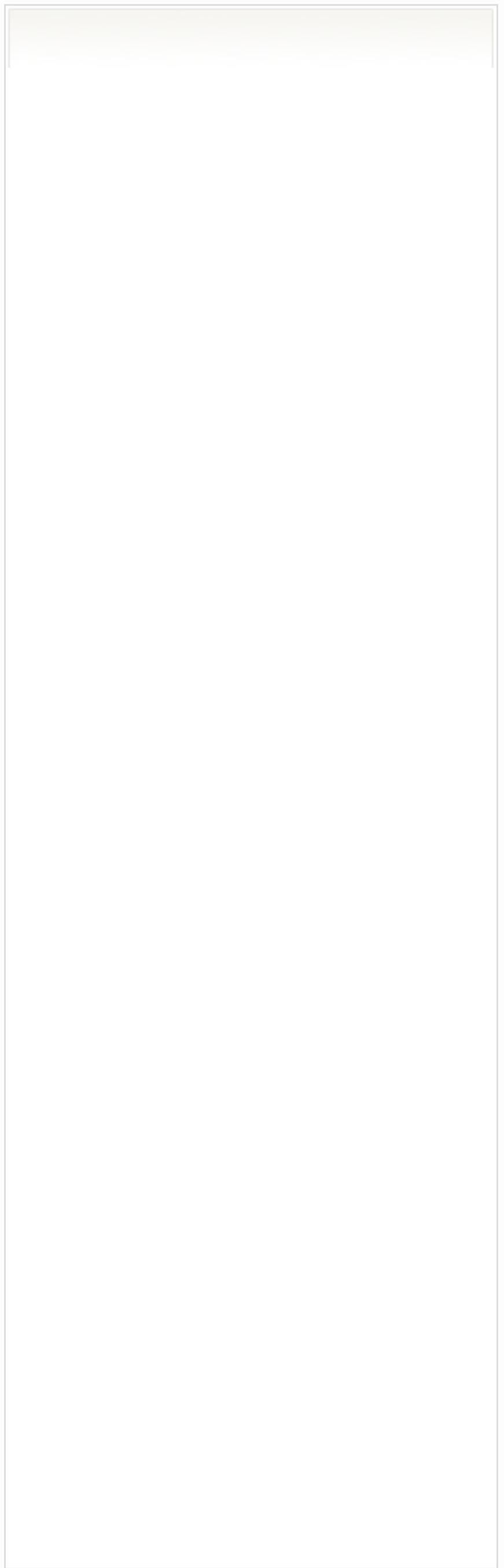
The choice to find meaning in suffering is one of our greatest opportunities. This requires courage. This requires fortitude. This requires endurance.

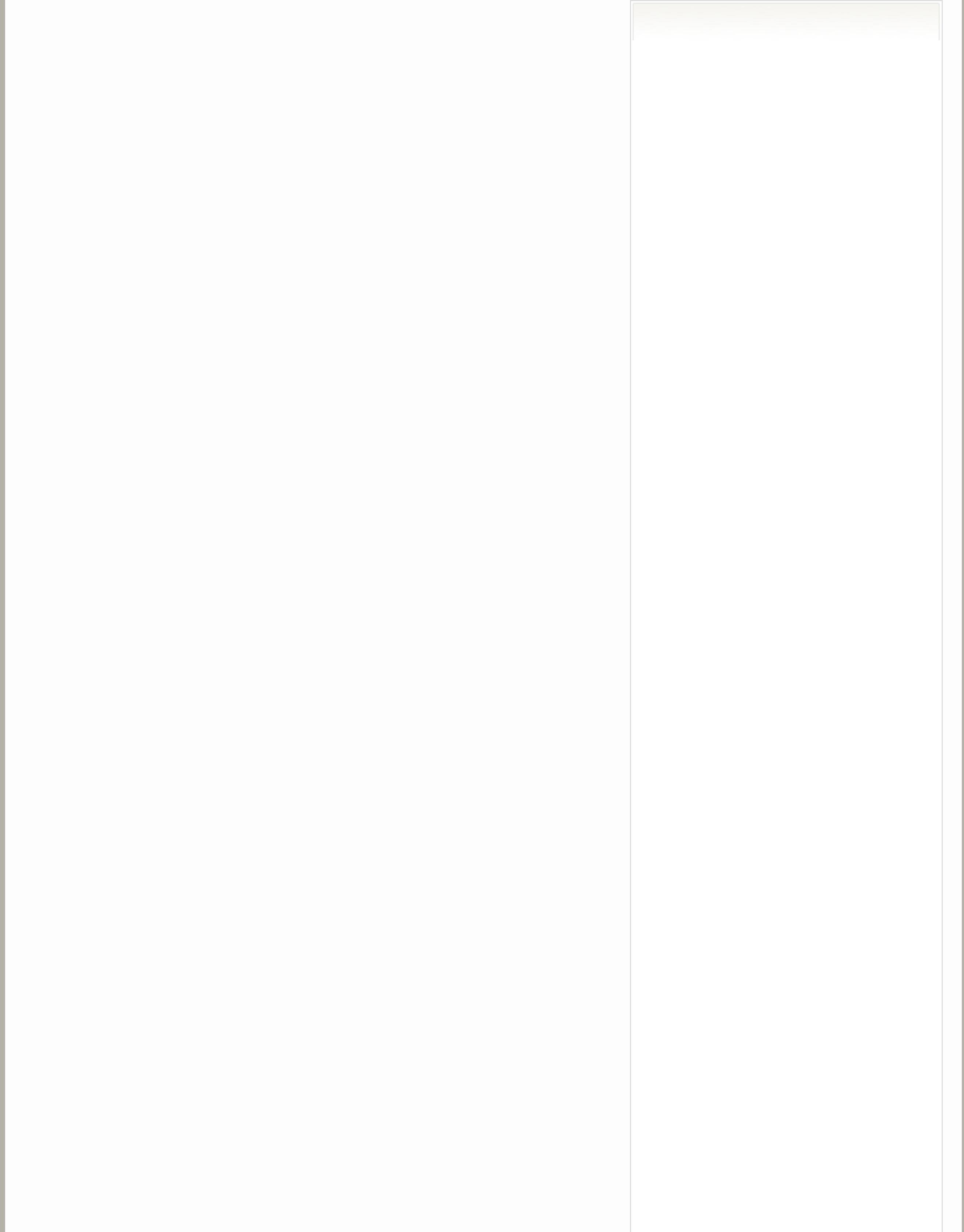


Abstinence-Focused Driver's Education

...if cars were supposed to have more than one driver they'd have been made with more than one steering wheel. — The most important thing you can learn about driving is not to drive until [Read More...]

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Jed Diamond can't think of anything more important for the peace and well-being of the world than deepening the dialogue of what it means to be a good man.

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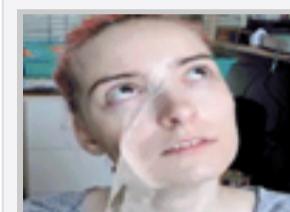
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DIY: Two Simple Daily Steps to Erase Years From Your Face



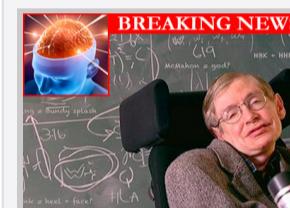
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