

Social Emotional Learning Helps People Feel a Deep Sense of Satisfaction About the World



By Dan Kranzler
Founder
Kirlin Charitable Foundation

Dan Kranzler has been a managing partner of eFund LLC, a venture fund that invests in wireless and technology startups, for the past 15 years. Profits from the fund go to children's charities through the Kirlin Charitable Foundation, which he founded with his family. The goal of the Kirlin Charitable Foundation and its offshoot, Seeds of Compassion, is to have a global society that is identified first and foremost by the grace of its empathy and compassion.

For the last 15 years, our family foundation, the Kirlin Charitable Foundation, has been working with and on the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL), which we call Seeds of Compassion.

At first, people weren't very clear about SEL. Today most people know what it means, and a general appreciation is growing for its critical role and benefits. The real sense of SEL's value is being understood and employed at all levels from early learning through schools and on to business.

SEL is reflected in the regional programs of Kirlin and the Seeds of Compassion organization. Its focus is to help bring children up, beginning at birth, with a deep sense of attachment and connection to family, and expanding this attachment to friends and community through strong social-emotional foundations. This means making sure kids have an awareness of being safe, being loved, belonging, and how they fit into their environment.

When we add an understanding of their emotions—how to identify, regulate, and express them—the result is they feel the world is interconnected and worth living in.

Our goal is helping people achieve happiness so they can develop and fulfill their potential. If we're happy with who we are, where we are, and where we fit in, there is joy. And if there's joy, we're interested in doing the right things; we're also feeling connected to and interested in the world and people around us.

We have a great deal more information that can guide us toward a whole and happy life today than we did in the past. We also understand the benefits from this—the reduction in anxiety and stress, for example. And it's clear that how we view our circumstances and react to them, and how we see ourselves contributing to society, community, family, or a company, helps determine our sense of well-being.

We may know more today, but it's still not always easy to achieve that sense of interconnection and well-being. Part of the reason is that we're spending less time with our families, less time in our communities, and less time in places of faith. Technology, which is a good and connective thing

“People with social-emotional skills are the kind of people that most businesses need and want to hire.”

on one level, has, ironically, also gotten in the way of our ability to connect on a human level. As a result, it's often harder to understand each other and ourselves.

One of the only institutions left that can really help is our schools. Unfortunately, though, so many children are starting school at the kindergarten level unprepared. Maybe they haven't been read to; maybe they're word-deficient; or maybe they live in a world of stress and are anxious and have trouble relating to others.

The good news is that schools, and specifically teachers, can help by employing SEL, teaching with compassion and care, and making sure every child has the foundations to understand and regulate emotions, communicate, and respect his or her peers in the classroom and beyond. Children have a tremendous social capacity. But they need help developing it and staying open so they can become confident learners and, ultimately, successful and well-adjusted adults.

Open people with social-emotional skills are the kind of people that most businesses need and want to hire. This is how the best collaboration, creative thinking, and problem solving gets unlocked.

Of course, companies have to have social-emotional practices, too. This is part of "conscious capitalism" (another long and interesting subject), with the objective to make employees feel listened to, comfortable, secure, valued, and respected.

If we can have compassionate schools, we can have compassionate communities, companies, and society. In all cases, social-emotional learning can help enrich people. And if students and employees can feel a deep sense of satisfaction with the world in which they live, then that world is going to be a much better place for all of us in the end—a world identified first and foremost by the grace of its empathy and compassion.