



# Your Emotional *suitcase*

Suitcases, like people, come in all different sizes, shapes, colours, materials and designs. They contain all kinds of personal things and are packed with a certain purpose in mind. Ever wondered about what suitcase fits with which person at an airport baggage terminal? Ever wondered what your “suitcase” says about you?

In the last issue, we talked about how to embark on an emotional journey, especially considering who to embark on this journey with. This time, we are packing the bags and getting ready to leave on our proverbial jet-plane. So, the question arises, what do we put into the suitcase and why?

Generally, a suitcase is supposed to contain all we are going to need for a particular trip. And, our suitcase is usually filled with our personal and preferred outfits, necessities and comforts: its contents usually carry with it our marks of individuality - from the way in which we pack the suitcase, to what we pack or what we include and exclude. In many respects, the package with which you come into your coach or therapist's office is similar to the suitcase metaphor...

Have you ever spent time at the baggage terminal in an airport and looked at the suitcases? And have you ever observed which suitcase is picked up by which person, and if the suitcase “matches” your expectation of the person you, in your mind's eye, associated the suitcase with? Often the suitcases are congruent with the image of the traveller, other times, not at all. So what does this say? It says something about first impressions, about exteriors not always being indicative of what goes on in the inside of someone and sometimes it tells of the wear and tear of life travelled thus far. The “suitcase” you bring with you will also tell a story.

A part of that story has to do with your persona, your personality, life-skill abilities and also your life history. Part of what is enjoyable in emotional journeying is discovering a lot about who you are, how others see you, laughing at how accurately an MBTI or EQi profile describes you and giving yourself recognition for the journey already travelled, acknowledging how this has, to a large extent, contributed to making you the person you are.

So, what do all these concepts refer to?

- Your persona is the “exterior face/image” you portray to the outside – what you want other people to see about you and what you are prepared to reveal about yourself.
- Personality has more to do with how you actually are within yourself – your preferences and your “natural state” of being. Personality is well described by the MBTI.
- The MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator) is a measuring instrument that places you into one of 16 personality types determined by a combination of preferences on a continuum of opposites related to Introversion/Extraversion, Sensing/Intuiting, Thinking/Feeling and Judging/Perceiving. It also informs you of your shadow or flip side – the side that comes out when you are under pressure or feeling very tired (or a little tipsy!). This is a “wellness” instrument, not a personality test that focuses on pathology or on inability. In this respect, it is helpful in enabling you to understand yourself and others – since you learn to understand how others might prefer to do things differently from yourself and how this might actually be a good or complimentary thing, rather than something to be seen as bad. It often works miracles in a marriage or relationship when you come to see how your partner is not necessarily terrible, just different – and often opposite – since, yes, we are attracted to opposites. This is more often than not so, complementing or filling gaps in areas in which we lack competence.
- EQi is a measurement of your emotional intelligence, another wellness instrument that gives a snap shot of your life-coping skills and includes aspects regarding your relationship with yourself (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence and self-actualisation), your relationship with others (empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility), your level of stress management (impulse control and stress tolerance), your degree of adaptability (reality testing, flexibility and problem solving) and your general attitude and disposition (happiness and optimism). As you can see from this list, these are indicators about what goes on inside of you and how this translates to the world “out there”.

So, we can see how your suitcase is busy filling up with some intended or intentionally packed items (things that you know about yourself and are willing to share), and some unintended or unintentionally packed items (that your coach or therapist will help you discover as you go along so that you can see why you packed them in).

Also packed into your suitcase (some items perhaps being packed into the hidden compartment) will be things that pertain to your life journey, from the family in which you grew up in; the impacts of the social environments you were exposed to as a young child, adolescent and adult; support systems; friends; teachers; school, post-school and work experiences; possible trauma/loss experienced; partners and significant others - all of which have played a part in your life. Some of these items will be easier to deal with than others, but that's the great part about a suitcase: you can pack it out slowly, keeping some items in it for a later opportunity, and you can zip it up and lock it for a while if the going gets a bit too hectic...

Another two items that would need be packed into an emotional journey suitcase would be (i) your sense of humour - especially the ability to laugh at yourself and (ii) your willingness to face up to the difficult elements in order to invite growth. If it's too comfortable, you are not growing.

Last but not least, your reading glasses (since reading is, and will become, a necessary companion during the journey), a lot of tissues for the tears of sorrow and the tears of joy, a water pistol (to shoot at your therapist/coach when they get to the hard, sore bits), a journal to jot down and express your emotions and experiences and a bunch of good girlfriends to share you journey with and support you through it.

The next article will introduce us to some fellow travellers on the jet-plane, so that we can hear their stories and understand where their journeys might have taken them. Pack well!