

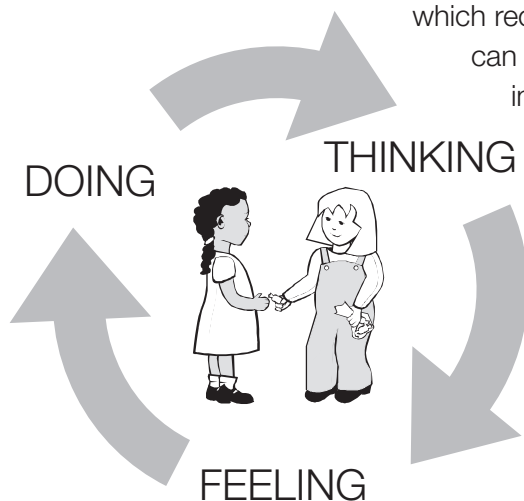
# The Essence of Social Interaction Skills

## Thinking-Feeling-Doing

As stated in the previous chapter, performance of social interaction skills is much more complicated than the performance of academic skills. Let's consider more closely the example I used in describing Tenet #5 in Chapter 2. I stated that a social interaction resembles a quarterback dropping back to pass, reading a defense, and making a throw. Think about what is involved in the action of making a successful pass. It first involves planning: the quarterback must think ahead in regard to the pass routes of his receivers and the alignment of the defense. Before the snap, information processing has begun. Next, it involves movement of the body: in order to put himself in position to make the pass, the quarterback must take the snap and drop back to pass. Good quarterbacks spend countless hours working on the footwork involved in dropping back to pass. Next, making a successful pass involves *real-time*

analysis; the quarterback must make dynamic decisions as to which receiver to throw to. Who wants a quarterback who can only process this information on the Monday morning after the game? Finally, after the quarterback

completes his analysis of the defense and makes a decision to throw the ball to a particular receiver, he must now throw the ball accurately. Just as you wouldn't want a strong-armed quarterback who continually makes bad defensive reads and throws the ball to the wrong team, you also wouldn't want the "smart" quarterback who makes the correct decisions but can't execute the throw. Oh yeah, one more thing: all of this must be done while regulating emotions!



Social interactions share many similarities with this example. Like a quarterback stepping to the line of scrimmage, we must plan our behavior prior to entering into a social interaction. What will we say? How will we say it? Who will we say it to? Social interactions also involve movement of our body, especially for children. Successful social interactions also involve social-cognitive processing, such as social problem solving, perspective taking, self-awareness, and attention. Finally, successful social interactions require us not only to process social information cognitively and make a behavioral decision but also to execute or perform social behaviors. We can't just decide on how, when, and with whom to initiate, we must actually initiate! To perform social skills fluently, we must have copious amounts of practice and repetition, and like the quarterback, we must do all of this while keeping our emotions in check.

Successful social interactions involve the successful integration of three components: *thinking, feeling, and doing*. For instance, every social interaction requires that we cognitively process the situation before us. This requires that we understand social rules and customs and read the contextual cues of the environment while examining the nonverbal cues of those with whom we are interacting. This, in turn, allows us to consider and understand another person's perspective while also monitoring and mediating our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. All these processes ultimately lead us to making a behavioral decision. In the course of a 2-minute interaction, we typically make dozens of behavioral decisions. Yet that is not all that goes on during a social interaction!

In addition to cognitive processing, we are also experiencing emotions that positively and negatively impact our thoughts and behaviors. Positive emotions lead to enhanced social engagement and pleasure, whereas negative emotions may lead to physiological stress, self-defeating thoughts, and behavioral avoidance. As such, social interactions require not only successful social-cognitive processing but also effective regulation of performance-hindering emotions. I'm sure your head is already spinning, but wait, there's more!

In addition to effective social-cognitive processing and regulation of emotions, successful social interactions require one additional critical component: **DOING!** Social interactions are dynamic performances that require us to make decisions and then execute those decisions fluently and effectively. This involves coordinating motor movements and language production while at the same time maintaining synchronicity with the motor movements and language production of the person with whom we are interacting.

Finally, we cannot forget that each component (thinking, feeling, doing) occurs simultaneously during social interactions. Makes algebra sound simple, doesn't it?