

Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

When you think of a “flawless leader,” what comes to mind?

You might picture someone who never lets their temper get out of control, no matter what problems they are facing. Or you might think of someone who has the complete trust of her staff, listens to her team, is easy to talk to, and always makes careful, informed decisions.

These are qualities of someone with a high degree of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence has become more important than ever for Leaders who are faced with extraordinary demands at work and at home as the Covid-19 pandemic rages on. At work, most have had to both manage employees remotely as well as adapt in-person operations to accommodate ever-evolving safety protocols, maintain productivity even with staffing shortages caused by the virus and increase their skill in supporting positive mental health in the workplace. The leaders that thrive in leading their teams through this crisis with no clear end in sight will be the ones with the highest emotional intelligence.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence or EQ is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions and those around you. People with a high degree of emotional intelligence know what they’re feeling, what their emotions mean, and how these emotions can affect other people.

For leaders, having emotional intelligence is essential for success. After all, who is more likely to succeed, a leader who exhibits outbursts at his team when he’s under stress or a leader who stays in control and calmly assesses the situation?

According to Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who helped to popularize emotional intelligence, there are five key elements to EQ:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy.
- Social skills.

The more that you, as a leader, manage each of these areas, the higher your emotional intelligence. Looking at each element in more detail can help you grow as a leader.

Emotional Intelligence in Leadership:

1. Self-awareness

If you’re self-aware, you always know how you feel and you know how your emotions and your actions can affect the people around you. Being self-aware when you’re in a leadership position also means having a clear picture of your strengths and weaknesses.

So, what can you do to improve your self-awareness?

- Keep a journal – if you spend a few minutes each day writing down your thoughts, this can move you to a higher degree of self-awareness.
- Slow down – When you experience anger or other strong emotions, slow down to examine why. Remember, no matter what the situation, you can always choose how you react to it.

2. Self-regulation

Leaders who regulate themselves effectively rarely verbally attack others, make rushed or emotional decisions, stereotype people, or compromise their values. Self-regulation is all about staying in control.

So, how can you improve your ability to self-regulate?

- Know your values - Do you have a clear idea of where you absolutely will not compromise? Do you know what values are most important to you? Spend some time examining your “code of ethics.” If you know what’s most important to you, then you probably won’t have to think twice when you face a moral or ethical decision. You will automatically make the right choice.
- Hold yourself accountable – If you tend to blame others when something goes wrong, stop. Make a commitment to admit to your mistakes and to face the consequences,

whatever they are. You'll probably sleep better at night and you will earn the respect of those around you.

- Practice being calm – The next time you're in a challenging situation, be very aware of how you act. Do you relieve your stress by shouting at someone else? Practice deep-breathing exercises to calm yourself. Also, try to write down all of the negative things you want to say and then rip it up and throw it away. Expressing these emotions on paper (and not showing them to anyone!) is better than speaking them aloud to your team.

3. Motivation

Self-motivated leaders work consistently toward their goals and have extremely high standards for the quality of their work.

How can you improve your motivation?

- Re-examine why you're doing your job – It is easy to forget what you really love about your career. So, take some time to remember why you are doing what you are doing.
- Know where you stand – Determine how motivated you are to lead.
- Be hopeful and find something good – Motivated leaders are usually optimistic, no matter what problems they face. Adopting this mindset might take practice.

Every time you face a challenge or even a failure, try to find at least one good thing about the situation. It might be something small or something with long-term effects, like an important lesson learned. There is usually always something positive.

4. Empathy

For leaders, having empathy is critical to managing a successful team or organization. Leaders with empathy have the ability to put themselves in someone else's situation. They help develop the people on their team, challenge others who are acting unfairly, give constructive feedback and listen to those who need it.

If you want to earn the respect and loyalty of your team, then show them you care by being empathic.

How can you improve your empathy?

- Put yourself in someone else's position – It's easy to support your own point of view. Take the time to look at situations from other people's perspectives.
- Pay attention to body language – Perhaps when you listen to someone, you cross your arms or move your feet back and forth. Learning to read body language can be a real asset in a leadership role. This gives you the opportunity to respond appropriately.
- Respond to feelings – Respond by addressing feelings. Tell staff you appreciate them working extra hours. If possible, figure out a way for future late nights to be less of an issue (for example, flex days and give one off).

5. Social Skills

Leaders who do well in the social skills element of emotional intelligence are great communicators. They're just as open to hearing bad news as good news and they're expert at getting their team to support them and be excited about a new mission or project.

Leaders who have good social skills are also good at managing change and resolving conflicts diplomatically. They are rarely satisfied with leaving things as they are, but they don't sit back and make everyone else do the work: They set an example with their own behavior.

How can you build social skills?

- Learn conflict resolution – Leaders must know how to resolve conflicts between their team members, customers, or vendors. Learning conflict resolution skills is vital if you want to succeed.
- Improve your communication skills
- Learn how to praise others – As a leader, you can inspire the loyalty of your team simply by giving praise when it's earned. Learning how to praise others is a fine art, but well worth the effort.

To be effective, leaders must have a solid understanding of how their emotions and actions affect the people around them. The better a leader relates to and works with others, the more successful he or she will be.

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