

Why Do Leaders Need Emotional Intelligence?

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Everyone watches the boss. Team members take their cues from the boss. You know that's true based on the bosses you've had. So why do you think that wouldn't be true with the organization you lead?

When you meet with your team, does anyone talk more often than you? Aren't you the person who tends to bring up new topics for discussion? When others do speak, aren't they typically responding or commenting on something you said? (That's true, by the way, even after you leave the room!)

Your team looks to you to make meaning of situations. Even if your work team is highly collaborative, folks still watch for your initial reactions. Team members respond to the direction and vision you set, the guidelines you establish for the actions needed, and the amount and types of feedback that you provide.

Your body language, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice are significant influences on your team's morale and commitment. Perhaps you underestimate the degree to which that's true, just as I did early in my career when my boss brought those characteristics to my attention. (This was in the early 1970s, well before Daniel Goleman revealed the term "emotional intelligence" to the world.)

As a young team manager for Procter & Gamble, I was unconvinced. Were the dozen people on my team affected by my level of enthusiasm as I communicated with them at the start of the shift? When my boss suggested I pay attention to my moods and behaviors, I set up a simple experiment.

For a full week, I came in early and looked for all the reasons the previous shift had set us up to be successful. I communicated that information to the team with optimism and excitement, fully anticipating a successful shift. (On some days, my frame of mind and the circumstances made that quite difficult!)

The next week, I also came in early, looking for the many problems that we'd be inheriting from the previous shift. I emphasized the obstacles we'd be facing, sounding grim about the prospects for our shift. I pointed out the quality problems and reliability issues that were likely to hit us.

Sure, it wasn't a professionally designed comparison. There were likely other variables that changed from one week to the next. However, the combined differences in production volume, quality issues, downtime, and safety concerns were striking. The contrast made a big impression on me. From that point, I remained aware of my moods, especially when I was feeling "down."

Maybe you doubt this applies to you. Maybe you focus on the content of what you share, minimizing the impact of the style or method you use to share it. Despite your denial, the nature of your interaction instills a residual, low-key emotional feeling in team members. The sentiment is likely reinforced by the informal dialogue that continues even after you leave.

Both good and bad moods tend to perpetuate themselves because they skew perceptions and memories. When people feel upbeat, they see the positives in a situation and remember the celebrations associated with past incidents. They perform with creativity, optimism about achieving goals, and willingness to stick with the task until completion.

When people feel defeated, they focus on limitations and handicaps, making excuses rather than persistent attempts. Emotional conflicts bleed energy away from necessary tasks. If you tolerate unresolved conflict, establish unreasonable demands, or fail to set an appealing vision, the dissension is called "dissonance."

In contrast, when you empathize with the needs of team members, engage them in considering creative options, and instill a spirit of enthusiasm and hope, that's called "resonance." Look around your particular organization. Who are the leaders with whom most people resonate?

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* in 1995 and coauthor with Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee of *Primal Leadership* in 2002, studied competence models from almost 500 global companies. Over 80% of the skills that distinguish outstanding leaders from the other leaders in those companies are associated with emotional intelligence.

You might argue that purely cognitive competencies, such as technical expertise, should be among the skills needed for success. They are, to be sure. But they tend to be “threshold abilities,” skills people need to simply do the basic job. The high performers in most organizations are those who naturally possess or have been able to develop emotional intelligence.

To learn more about emotional intelligence, consider reading the two books mentioned above. If you want an overview that gives a good introduction, consider the shorter *Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*, published in 2005 by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves.

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