



Soft skills for hard results

Why good leaders need Emotional Intelligence

We can probably all think of leaders who have impacted us most. After Obama won the US Presidency, everyone named him as one of these. Others usually include Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, or Richard Branson. All could be regarded as very emotionally intelligent (EQ). All have or had very high commitment amongst their supporters or staff. EQ is a key distinguisher.

Let's look at a classic example of when it doesn't make a positive impact. You may have had this experience or certainly heard of it: You are called in to see your manager for what you think is a routine conversation, only to be told that the company is making your role redundant and that security are now waiting to escort you from the building. You are completely shocked and it takes you a while to get over it. During the process you feel very upset over how you have been treated. The memory of the event and the resentment may last a long time and of course you have told many people, all of whom will hold a negative view of the company.

A study was done of how two companies downsized. One, GE, spent a lot of time giving notice of the decision, explaining it to the staff and empathising. They were closely watched by those who stayed. At another there was no advance notice, just one week. At GE, a year later a majority said it was a good place to work. At the other, only 3% said the same.

It can be very telling watching leaders give their staff bad news. Ones who do it well demonstrate a lot of empathy. While they are clear and firm in telling people what needs to be said, they show sensitivity to their staff's feelings and take time during a session to listen and respond to questions. This reinforces what many probably know, that empathy can be a really key distinguishing EQ feature among leaders. The difficulty is that those who don't have it don't understand why it is necessary. For example, it does not occur to them that people generally need to feel heard. What is so often missing is a sensitivity to others, an awareness of their perspective and/or a willingness to find out, in order to better construct a decision.

In another well-known study, the BT Global Challenge yacht race, a series of totally inexperienced volunteers were selected in the UK to race against prevailing winds and current round the world. In one very telling episode right at the start, before any sailing took place, those that ultimately figured among the winners immediately spent a lot of initial training time on team building, whilst others went off to train on technical skills. The study of the race itself reinforced earlier evidence that amongst 11 key high-performing behaviours, leaders needed empathy, team work and developing people, all central EQ abilities, along with 3 others, influencing, bolstering confidence and presentation. The winning team had such a high level of team integration that in the latter stages of the race, the skipper could spend a lot of time below deck plotting the best competitive route home while the team sailed the boat.



It is therefore a distinguishing feature of high performing leaders that they have high emotional intelligence (EQ). It is more critical than the general population, not that we all won't benefit from working on our EQ. This point is illustrated by the following results from research into the role of EQ in business:

- Where senior managers had a critical mass of EQ capabilities, their divisions outperformed yearly earning goals by 15-20%
- In 44 Fortune 500 US companies, sales people with high EQ achieved twice the sales levels as those with average EQ.
- 90% of the success of a leader was due to EQ in top executives of 15 global companies (eg. influence, team leadership, political awareness, empathy, self-confidence and achievement drive)
- When key executives failed, 2 main reasons were found: a lack of flexibility, such as being unable to adapt, or take on board feedback and learn, and poor relationships and alienating others.
- In terms of hard data, EQ is key for leaders. In a comparison of EQ with intelligence and technical ability (IQ), among all jobs 33% of ability was related to was IQ & Technical, but 66% EQ. When this is applied to leaders, 15% was IQ & Technical but 85% was EQ
- Not developing EQ is costly: losing a key player is estimated to cost 1 year's salary

To be emotionally intelligent, you need to focus on four key areas. They are:

1. **Self-awareness:** The core skill, which enables us to guide our own behaviour: it includes being aware of our emotions and their effects on work, performance, relationships, etc., knowing our strengths and developmental gaps and our belief in ourselves
2. **Self-Management:** Crucially this concerns our ability to keep disruptive feelings under control but also how we manage ourselves, such as our ability to be authentic and open, flexibility, our internal driver to improve performance, the readiness to take the initiative and our levels of optimism
3. **Social Awareness:** This is about our attunement to others, with the vital ability to empathise with others' emotions, perspectives and concerns. Such awareness extends to an awareness of and responsiveness to others' developmental needs, an awareness of the currents within an organisation and a readiness to provide service to customers
4. **Building Relationships:** The ability to build effective relationships within organisations, displaying leadership qualities in, for example, inspiring and motivating others, the ability to influence others, open and clear communication, a readiness to listen, the ability to work in and with teams and the ability to manage conflict and handle change positively.

(You can read more about these abilities in Daniel Goleman's excellent book, "*Working with Emotional Intelligence*")

The key to these abilities is **self-awareness**, from which the others flow. One cannot stress this enough. If you don't know what you are doing, how can you change it? Self-awareness involves being aware of what is going on within, being aware of senses, feelings, thoughts and what motivates behaviour. A self-aware person can check themselves out before acting and they can notice their own responses to what is



happening around them. They are more likely to be authentic in their communication and others find it easier to respond to them. This is why authenticity is such a powerful leadership quality. People will follow those whom they believe to be genuine. To be authentic, you need to know what is happening within and allow that to be visible.

In turn, to be able to be authentic, you will need to have done your own journeying, to have discovered and be able to trust those inner impulses and responses. You will need to be able to separate out that which is not yours but perhaps stuff you've taken on board from others, which in turn you might, if you were not self-aware, be projecting on to others. You will need to know those impulses within that don't serve you and bracket them off, not let them get in the way. You will need a level of comfortableness with who you are and be able to distinguish that from who you are not. You will need to know when your buttons get pushed, when you get off on one, know what that is about and let it go or put it on one side when you are out there dealing with others.

The reward for becoming more emotionally intelligent is that you will be far better equipped at senior levels to build, motivate and lead teams to great results. As the figures revealed above, good leaders energise others to achieve. That is what it is about. Thus soft skills get the hard results. Businesses today need that. It is no longer enough to drive improvement through coercive or pace-leading methods. What happens with those approaches is that when the pressure is taken off, the old habits reappear of the demotivated ease off. This has been well-demonstrated through research (eg Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 2002). Those two approaches drive down organisational climate and people don't like working there. But, in the current climate many leaders will resort to those approaches – and everyone will see the morale drop. To get the best out of people, leaders need to build resonance with those they lead, create connections and bonding, establish rapport, and ensure consistency between the vision of the leader and the aspirations of those that follow, so that the results they look for are ones that people feel inspired to achieve.