You might picture someone who never lets his temper get out of control, no matter what problems he’s 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.

In this article, we’ll look at why emotional intelligence is so important for leaders – and how you, as a leader, can improve yours.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, and those of the people 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 shouts at his team when he’s under stress, or a leader who stay in control, and calmly assesses the situation?

According to Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who helped to popularize EI, there are five main elements of emotional intelligence:

1. Self-awareness.
2. Self-regulation.
4. Empathy.
5. Social skills.

The more that you, as a leader, manage each of these areas, the higher your emotional intelligence. So, let's look at each element in more detail and examine how you can grow as a leader.

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, and it means behaving with humility.

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.

This element of emotional intelligence, according to Goleman, also covers a leader’s flexibility and commitment to personal accountability.

3. Motivation

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

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.

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're 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.

Key Points

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.

Take the time to work on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Working on these areas will help you excel in the future!