Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

Does your emotional intelligence lift your team to new heights?

When you think of a "perfect leader," what comes to mind?

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 or 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 emotional intelligence, there are five key elements to it:

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.

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

- **Keep a journal** – Journals help you improve your self-awareness. If you spend just 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. (Our article on Managing Your Emotions at Work will help you understand what your emotions are telling you.)

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'll 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'll quickly 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. What's more, this helps you challenge your reactions to ensure that they're fair!

### 3. Motivation

Self-motivated leaders work consistently toward their goals, and they 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's easy to forget what you really love about your career. So, take some time to remember why you wanted this job. If you're unhappy in your role and you're struggling to remember why you wanted it, try the Five Whys technique to find the root of the problem. Starting at the root often helps you look at your situation in a new way.

  And make sure that your goal statements are fresh and energizing. For more on this, see our article on [Goal Setting](#).

- **Know where you stand** – Determine how motivated you are to lead. Our [Leadership Motivation Assessment](#) can help you see clearly how motivated you are in your leadership role. If you need to increase your motivation to lead, it directs you to resources that can help.

- **Be hopeful and find something good** – Motivated leaders are usually optimistic, no matter what problems they face. Adopting this mindset might take practice, but it's well worth the effort.

  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, like a new contact, or something with long-term effects, like an important lesson learned. But there’s almost always something positive, if you look for it.

### 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. After all, it's yours! But take the time to look at situations from other people's perspectives. See our article on Perceptual Positions for a useful technique for doing this.

- **Pay attention to body language** – Perhaps when you listen to someone, you cross your arms, move your feet back and forth, or bite your lip. This body language tells others how you really feel about a situation, and the message you're giving isn't positive! Learning to read body language can be a real asset in a leadership role, because you'll be better able to determine how someone truly feels. This gives you the opportunity to respond appropriately.

- **Respond to feelings** – You ask your assistant to work late – again. And although he agrees, you can hear the disappointment in his voice. So, respond by addressing his feelings. Tell him you appreciate how willing he is to work extra hours, and that you're just as frustrated about working late. If possible, figure out a way for future late nights to be less of an issue (for example, give him Monday mornings 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'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.

So, 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** – How well do you communicate? Our communication quiz will help you answer this question, and it will give useful feedback on what you can do to improve.

- **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.

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!