

CHAPTER 3

The Emotionally Intelligent Leader: Habits, Practices, and Attributes of Executive Excellence

One can have no smaller or greater mastery than
mastery of oneself.

—*Leonardo da Vinci*

Contrary to the opinion of many people, leaders are not
born. Leaders are made, and they are made by effort and
hard work.

—*Vince Lombardi*

Reading Points

- Beyond “Smart”
- What Is Emotional Intelligence?
- Emotional Intelligence and Leadership
- Emotional Intelligence Matters
- Gender Differences
- Can Emotional Intelligence Be Learned?
- How to Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

HAVE YOU EVER wondered why certain individuals just seem to accelerate in their careers? They weren't necessarily 4.0 GPA students, but when your paths cross now, they seem to have a rocket strapped to their back. These super-successes are being promoted, advancing their careers quickly, leading others, and spearheading new initiatives. What sets them apart from the rest? In this chapter, we explore their secret—the one ingredient that every successful executive possesses and hones through every stage of her or his career.

BEYOND “SMART”

Our industry and organizations nationwide are filled with individuals who “check all the boxes.” Their resume—their degrees, certifications, credentials, and work experience (heck, even their home address, subdivision, and country club membership)—fulfills all the requirements of the position they're employed to perform. Developing strategic plans, implementing new processes, writing budgets, analyzing data—executing these tasks makes one a tactician. But true leadership requires collaboration. This next level of leadership also includes navigating change with others and influencing outcomes through others—plus large doses of empathy, social and relational savvy, and self-awareness.

Let's face it—the hardest parts of any job are rarely found in the tactical. Clear-cut problems are easily resolved with more information or training. The greatest challenge of work involves the human quotient.

Emotional intelligence is the variable that separates the tacticians from the true leaders, the smarty-pants from the exceptional executives. The emotionally intelligent leader pursues mastery of both the tactical and the human elements of his or her job. In this chapter, we explore what emotional intelligence is, share research that explains why it's important for success, and lay out a few ways you can continue to develop it as you progress in your career.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2017) defines *intelligence quotient* (IQ) as

- 1: a number used to express the apparent relative intelligence of a person, such as
 - a: the ratio of the mental age (as reported on a standardized test) to the chronological age multiplied by 100,
 - b: a score determined by one's performance on a standardized test relative to the average performance of others of the same age.
- 2: proficiency in or knowledge of a specified subject. Example: "Nobody questioned his hockey IQ."

By contrast, Daniel Goleman, PhD, an author, psychologist, and science journalist, defines *emotional intelligence* as

- 1: the ability to understand oneself and to empathize with others.
- 2: the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.

How does Goleman's definition apply to the emerging, developing leader? Does emotional intelligence even matter in the workplace?

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND LEADERSHIP

If you had to list the most common attributes and competencies traditionally associated with leadership, what would they be? Traits such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision probably spring to mind.

What about emotionally intelligent people? What would you list as their resounding characteristics? You might picture them with a high level of self-awareness and self-regulation. They are highly motivated and empathetic, and they possess strong social and relationship management skills.

The two lists of traits don't seem to overlap much. So does emotional intelligence even matter when it comes to leadership potential? The short answer: yes. As we will explore in this chapter, many experts argue that emotional intelligence is more—perhaps even much more—important than IQ.

A 2012 article published by *Forbes* magazine proposed that IQ alone is barely an indicator when it comes to predicting success and professional achievement, and that a high IQ does not guarantee you will stand out among the crowd (Jensen 2012).

The management theory called the Peter Principle states that those who are selected for promotions are chosen more for their performance in their current role than for their technical knowledge related to the newly intended role. Could your ability to self-assess, collaborate, empathize, and motivate yourself and influence others really get you promoted above your technical skill level? Let's dig into the research to find out.

Goleman and *Harvard Business Review*

Goleman, who reported for the *New York Times* for 12 years on topics related to the brain and behavioral sciences, first applied the concept of emotional intelligence to the business world when he published the results of his research in *Harvard Business Review* in 1998. His study, conducted at nearly 200 large, global companies, found direct connections between emotional intelligence and business results.

Goleman's objective was to determine which personal capabilities drove outstanding performance in these companies, and to what degree they did so. He measured three main categories:

1. Technical skills, such as accounting, business planning, and project management
2. Cognitive abilities, such as analytical reasoning
3. Competencies demonstrating emotional intelligence, such as the ability to work with others and effectiveness in leading change

As expected, he found that technical skills and cognitive abilities were important drivers of outstanding performance, but considering all three categories as ingredients of success, emotional intelligence was two times more important than the others for job roles at all levels. “Research clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won’t make a great leader,” Goleman (1998) concluded.

The importance of emotional intelligence goes beyond leadership. David McClelland, PhD, a renowned researcher in human and organizational behavior, found that emotional intelligence also influences performance (McClelland 1998). In 1996, McClelland studied global company Pepsi and found that when senior managers had a critical mass of emotional intelligence, their divisions outperformed annual projections by 20 percent. He also found that division leaders without that critical mass underperformed by the same percentage. His findings were consistent across divisions of the company throughout the world.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MATTERS

Travis Bradberry, coauthor of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, wrote an article for *Inc.* magazine in 2015 that claimed emotional intelligence scores drop like a rock for those holding director and higher titles, and CEOs have the lowest average emotional intelligence scores in the business world.

But what about the Peter Principle mentioned earlier? Isn't a high level of emotional intelligence more likely to get you promoted than your technical skills? Bradberry agrees that emotional intelligence scores rise steadily from entry-level positions through middle management. Middle managers tend to have high, if not the highest, emotional intelligence scores in the workplace. Most companies would agree that people who are levelheaded and generally good with people should be promoted into management.

Things get interesting, though, when you move past middle management. Emotional intelligence scores decrease dramatically through the director, vice president, and senior executive roles, with CEO at the very bottom.

So how can any CEO be successful? The key to remember is that for each title mentioned in Bradberry's article, the top performers will still be those with the highest emotional intelligence scores. Even though CEOs have the lowest average emotional intelligence scores in the workplace, the best-performing CEOs are those with the highest emotional intelligence scores compared to their counterparts.

Companies that rely solely on business metrics to measure and manage employee performance and make hiring and promotion decisions for positions at any level—entry level to middle management to CEO—will eventually fall victim to the unsustainability of these short-term, bottom-line indicators.

Others in the research and business world agree. Check out this summary from a 2015 *Fast Company* article (Deutschendorf 2015): "Research by the respected Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in the U.S. found that the primary causes of executive derailment involve deficiencies in emotional competence. Each year, CCL serves more than 20,000 individuals and 2,000 organizations, including more than 80 of the Fortune 100 companies. It says the three main reasons for failure are difficulty in handling change, inability to work well in a team, and poor interpersonal relations."

And, as stated in the *Forbes* article (Jensen 2012): "Research carried out by the Carnegie Institute of Technology shows that 85 percent of your financial success is due to skills in 'human engineering,'

your personality and ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead. Shockingly, only 15 percent is due to technical knowledge.”

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Goleman (1998) even touches on gender differences in his research. What do you think? Are women more emotionally intelligent than men?

Goleman found that women tend to be more aware of their emotions, show more empathy, and be more adept interpersonally. Men tend to be more self-confident and optimistic, adapt more easily, and handle stress better. His findings were based on averages, though, so any one man might be as good as or better than his female counterpart at being aware of his emotions, and a woman might be as good as or better than her male counterpart at handling stress. Neither set of emotional intelligence qualities is better. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, according to Goleman.

In top business performers, both male and female, the gender differences in emotional intelligence abilities are a wash: Men are as good as women, and women are as good as men.

CAN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BE LEARNED?

Are truly great leaders born, or are they made? Let's relate this question to you, the emerging healthcare leader. Can you work on developing your emotional intelligence, just as you would your technical skills in our industry? If yes, how would you do that?

According to the *Forbes* article, “Emotional Intelligence . . . is about being aware of your own feelings and those of others, regulating these feelings in yourself and others, using emotions that are appropriate to the situation, self-motivation, and building relationships. Top Tip for Improvement: First, become aware of your inner dialogue. Stress can be a huge killer of emotional intelligence, so

you also need to develop healthy coping techniques that can effectively and quickly reduce stress in a volatile situation” (Jensen 2012).

Behavioral therapy demonstrates that change with lasting results requires positive reinforcement over time. People learn best through motivation, extended practice, and feedback. Now that you know the science and research behind emotional intelligence, let’s put it into practice.

HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Now that we’ve reviewed the supporting research and the business case for emotional intelligence, here are some suggested practices to help you improve your emotional intelligence.

- *Acquire self-awareness.* Remember reading about the importance of self-awareness in chapter 1? Knowledge and awareness of your personality and character—a clear grasp on your strengths and weaknesses, those related to both emotional capabilities and technical skills—may better position you for career advancement. Assessments like StrengthsFinder, Emergenetics, Kolbe, and Myers-Briggs may help in this often-awkward process of self-reflection.

Laurie tends to be highly instinctive and often is a catalyst for action. She is always ready to engage, which makes her a stellar advisor and project leader, especially when it comes to getting large initiatives off the ground and working under high-pressure deadlines. But the downside of this strength is an impulsive tendency. She responds instinctively from emotion, sometimes without weighing all the consequences of a course of action. For her, with the guidance and feedback of mentors, bosses, and coaches, working on the art of pausing and reflecting before

acting has had an incredible impact on her career success. Awareness of the effect of her quick decisions was an area of emotional intelligence that she identified as needing some improvement, and she has worked hard to continue to develop it. To the best of her ability, she has conditioned herself to pause and reflect on situations, to sleep on major decisions, and to seek the counsel of her more deliberative colleagues and advisors before moving forward.

Make reflection a habit. Consistently seek objective information and insight to allow growth and increase self-awareness.

- *Practice self-regulation.* Intentionally prepare for stressful circumstances or those in which you previously reacted in a suboptimal way. Again, set aside time to intentionally reflect on your experiences, and do so frequently. Which recent interactions went well? In which situations were you able to communicate successfully? To negotiate positively or critique someone respectfully? Have you had any meetings or conversations lately that didn't go well? What do you think went wrong? Who seems to push your buttons? Why do you think that is?

Catalog as many details as you can about the what, why, who, and how related to recent situations that involved working with others. Look for patterns. Assess your progress. Identify blind spots or areas of strength and weakness, set your goals accordingly, and hold yourself accountable for growth.

- *Consistently seek feedback on your performance and the manner in which you engage.* Be open to constructive criticism. If you have a professional mentor or trusted colleagues, ask for their feedback and be open to their candid assessment. Practice seeking and then rationally assessing and acting on the information you receive. Be a good listener. Seek to grow and improve in your leadership

of and engagement with those around you. Strive to put yourself in the relationships and social circumstances that position you for maximum success. Be on the lookout for others in your organization whose demeanor or presence you admire. Observe how they carry themselves and navigate challenging circumstances. Learn from them and use their experiences to improve your own performance.

Make an investment in your emotional intelligence. While the concept may be elusive and tricky to measure, its significance to your career success can be far greater than IQ alone. The good news is that, unlike talent and personality, emotional intelligence can be learned and improved.

Often thought of as a soft skill, or a “nice to have,” emotional intelligence has a powerful value in the workplace. Talents, skills, and competencies are valuable, but betting on them alone is insufficient. Leaders who achieve the greatest personal and professional success couple technical prowess with emotional and social savvy to influence extraordinary outcomes.

IQ will get you in the door. Emotional intelligence is what will set you apart and allow you to climb the ladder to the highest levels of success and personal well-being.

Remember These

- The greatest challenge of work often involves the human quotient. The emotionally intelligent leader pursues mastery of both the tactical and the human elements of her or his job.
- Research shows that technical skills and cognitive abilities are important drivers of outstanding performance, but considering all three categories as ingredients of success, emotional intelligence is two times more important than the others for job roles at all levels.



- Emotional intelligence influences performance. When senior managers in one company had a critical mass of emotional intelligence, their divisions outperformed annual projections by 20 percent. Division leaders without that critical mass underperformed by the same percentage.
- In top business performers, both male and female, the gender differences in emotional intelligence abilities are a wash. Men are as good as women, and women are as good as men.
- Middle managers tend to have high, if not the highest, emotional intelligence scores in the workplace. But when you move past middle management, emotional intelligence scores decrease dramatically through the director, vice president, and senior executive roles, with CEO at the very bottom.

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