

## Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

By Carol Dell'Amore

Think for a moment about a great boss that you have had or perhaps have now. Now, try to identify the things he or she does that make him or her “great” in your mind. Once you have a clear picture of those behaviors, think about how you feel when he or she does those things. Now, take this mental exercise one step further and repeat the steps considering a terrible boss you know of (most people have no trouble recalling someone that fits this category!).

When I lead MBA students or participants in leadership programs through this exercise, the responses about the great boss are usually something like this:

- communicates clearly and frequently
- is thoughtful of others
- demonstrates integrity and honesty
- is a teacher or mentor
- possesses a sense of humor
- is open to new ideas
- stands up for his or her team.

These boss qualities and behaviors make employees feel valued, loyal, and committed to their work. These feelings cause them to take ownership of their work, be more creative, take risks, strive to do their best, and produce higher quality work.

These are typical responses for a terrible boss:

- puts down people and their ideas
- plays political games
- is indecisive
- takes credit for others' work
- lacks good interpersonal skills.

The impact of these behaviors is that employees feel confused, angry, and very demotivated. To conclude the chain reaction, employees behave in very unproductive ways, do not try to fix problems, do not go the extra mile, and are more likely to be frequently absent from work or looking for other employment.

This modest activity is one of the clearest demonstrations of the link between leadership and emotional intelligence. Like it or not, if you are a leader, your moods, words, and deeds create an emotional climate among your work group, team, or organization. That emotional climate may be positive and upbeat, yielding positive employee responses, higher motivation, and productivity. Or, that emotional climate may be “toxic” producing a negative and unproductive workforce.

The emotionally intelligent leader understands this simple logic: if a leader's emotions and subsequent actions can either benefit or detract from worker satisfaction and productivity, would it not make sense to create a positive emotional climate rather than a negative one?

When you witness the ease with which people can recall a terrible boss, it appears that a good number our managers and leaders today have not learned this simple truth. Some would call them “clueless” and it all has to do with emotional intelligence.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

As defined by Daniel Goleman, popular author and emotional intelligence (EI) theorist, emotional intelligence is the capacity to both understand and manage the emotions of one's self and of others. EI is not a single construct, but a combination of competencies that fall into four clusters:

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness
- relationship management.

The Emotional Competence Inventory, published by the Hay Group and used for much of Goleman's research, is a 360-degree assessment tool that identifies 18 specific competencies within each of the four clusters.

The first cluster, self-awareness, involves not only an understanding of our emotions and what triggers them, but also the accurate understanding of our strengths and weaknesses and how you are perceived by others. Another aspect of self-awareness is self-confidence—possessing a sense of efficacy about yourself.

The theory goes that once we develop a sound understanding of ourselves and our emotional make-up, then we are able to control and manage our feelings. This is the second cluster of competencies: self-management. The competencies that form this cluster include exercising self-control, maintaining integrity, being adaptable, taking action, and striving for improvement. A new competency recently added to this cluster is the notion of optimism—keeping a positive outlook in spite of setbacks.

If you understand your own feelings you are not only able to manage yourself, but you are also able to understand the feelings of others. This is the third cluster, labeled social awareness. This cluster is most understood as empathy, understanding the nature of other's feelings and perspectives. But two other competencies make up this cluster: understanding the organization (what some would call political savvy) and the ability to appreciate and understand customer or client needs.

The final cluster, relationship management, is a natural progression of the previous three. Once you know yourself, manage yourself, and understand others, then you are in a position to manage others effectively. The competencies related to relationship management look like many that have been posed before as effective leadership behaviors: developing others, inspiring and influencing others with a vision, championing change, managing conflict, and being team-oriented.

These, then, are the qualities of an emotionally intelligent leader. It is interesting to note that Goleman's theory states that relationship management skills can only be developed after the other three clusters have been addressed. This may quite possibly explain why

many leadership training programs fail. Many programs attempt to jump immediately into training related to relationship management before allowing for the development of self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness skills.

### Developing Emotional Intelligence

One of the most frequently asked questions about EI is can it be developed? In other words, can you take those terrible bosses and turn them into great bosses? Or, at the very least, can you get those terrible bosses to improve on some, if not all, of their dysfunctional behaviors? Most authors, researchers, and practitioners in leadership development would say that the competencies that make up EI can be both taught and learned.

But, having said that, it does not mean that the process is a simple one. First, we are talking about behavior change and behavior change takes time. However, more than time is involved. The Center for Creative Leadership has developed three essential components for leadership development and these factors are just as applicable to the development of EI competencies.

The first essential step in development is assessment. Through formal techniques such as 360-degree feedback tools or by informal feedback from coworkers, you must first go through a process that identifies your current level of functioning. The notion is simple, you need to know where you are starting from in order to know if you have developed or changed. Richard Boyatzis, one of Goleman's coauthors, would add that in addition to an understanding of your current level of performance, another reflection is required. That step is the uncovering of who or what you want to be—what he calls the ideal self. This creates the motivation for change, a necessary precursor of any leadership development process.

The next component, according to the CCL model, is challenge. Very simply, this has to do with creating a behavioral goal that requires you to stretch, that takes you out of your comfort zone. If, for instance, you want to work on a specific EI competency that you recognize is not well developed, you need to put yourself into situations that require you to call upon that skill or perspective.

Finally, and probably the most important of the three, is the element of support. Remembering that behavior change takes time, we are talking months, not weeks, to truly integrate a new behavior into your repertoire. The one thing that is going to help you sustain the effort is support. This can come from any number of sources—a boss, a mentor, a professional coach. Whomever you choose, that person should be your cheerleader, providing you with ongoing feedback to keep you on track.

With these elements in place, change is possible. Yes, you can develop emotional intelligence. Is it easy? No! Does it take a lot of time, effort, practice, and support? Yes! Is it worth it? Just ask those folks who work for a terrible boss.

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