



Leading with Emotional Intelligence

By SUSAN YOUNG

When people are asked what traits and qualities they admire in their mentors and leaders, the typical responses are that they are caring, engaging, authentic, positive thinkers, creative, patient, empathetic, charismatic and thoughtful. These qualities are not taught in college textbooks or graduate school courses. They are learned and developed by people who have come to understand the value of Emotional Intelligence.

In our competitive business world, Emotional Intelligence, or EQ, is more important than your IQ. Your ability to connect with people on a genuine human level and build rapport with them is essential if you want to climb the ladder of success, and stay at the top.

Regardless of where you went to college and your SAT scores, your IQ can not be changed. The number you were born with is yours for life. IQ measures spatial and cognitive reasoning and is mathematically-based. It can help you in solving right angle problems and theorems but will not help in resolving breakdowns in communication while planning a team retreat, budget meeting or website overhaul. While education is so important in the building of our foundations and disciplines, a degree from an Ivy League school and an impressive IQ do not ensure that you have adequate communication skills to connect with others and be successful in the workplace.

Emotional Intelligence is what I call "street smarts." EQ is a huge factor in communication and conflict resolution, both at work and home. Individuals with high levels of EQ have compassion, empathy, congeniality, patience, assertiveness and self-awareness. Again, the good news is that EQ can be learned.

According to a survey conducted by *U.S. News & World Report*, 90% of people are fired from their jobs because of attitudinal or relationship problems. Only ten percent lose their jobs due to lack of skills or ability. A

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huge part of our success is based on our attitudes, communication and mindsets.

Developing Emotional Intelligence comes with age. Allow me to get scientific for just a moment. EQ is directly linked to our brain functions. The amygdala part of our brains is responsible for pulling out emotional meaning from nonverbal messages, like a scowl, shifts in posture and eye contact. The amygdala reads the emotional aspect of whatever we perceive. The problem is that this portion of our brain is not fully developed until the age of 25. This is why older people tend to be more adept at managing a variety of emotions and reactions. Chalk it up to life's experiences.

Top leaders understand that they need to be aware of how they behave, react, and respond in stressful situations and conflicts. It's important to know the "triggers" that can potentially set you off.

In the leadership training programs I provide on Emotional Intelligence and NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP), I repeatedly hear scenarios from people about how they mis-handled situations with colleagues, clients and prospects. Examples include raising voices, interrupting, criticism, defensive tone of voice, and negative body language.

Here are 3 Tips to Improving Your Emotional Intelligence:

1. Start watching people. Identify a few people who you admire for their empathy, self-confidence and assertive communication. Observe how they interact with others. Be aware of how people with strong Emotional Intelligence handle difficult people and situations. Leaders with high levels of EQ tend to bring individuals together instead of

dividing them. They are able to articulate and convey their opinions, recommendations, feelings and thoughts in a confident and calm way that is considerate and respectful to everyone. They don't blame others. They take full responsibility for their actions and behavior.

2. Develop assertive communication skills. People who lead and live with EQ understand that every spoken sentence does not require an answer. They don't react and they definitely don't over-react. Silence may initially feel awkward but silence in conversations and in conflicts can be extremely powerful. By asking good questions and truly listening, leaders show others that they genuinely care and are empathetic. Practice with the approach of less talking and more listening.

3. Validate the other person's feelings. Avoid shifting the focus of the conversation. It's important to allow others to express themselves without judging, criticizing or interrupting. If a co-worker complains to you that their items in the budget were cut, allow them to vent for a few minutes. Don't spend too much time talking about how you felt when you fell victim to a budget crunch at your old job. Even if you have never experienced the swinging budget ax, you can still be compassionate and listen. You don't have to fall out of a window to know it hurts.

Management and business guru Jim Rohn said, "Work on your career and you'll make a living. Work on yourself and you'll make a fortune."



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