

7 Keys to Leading with Emotional Intelligence

by Maureen Moriarty

Workplace Coach and Leadership Development



You can't lead effectively without emotional intelligence (EQ). Technical experience, workplace skills and smarts are important of course, but its emotional intelligence that enables you to be trusted, connected and persuasive in a leadership role.

I have spent over two decades coaching executives. My clients who demonstrate emotional intelligence are those with engaged followers, high performing teams and ultimately the ones who succeed as leaders. The ones with poor 360s or dysfunctional teams often lack emotional intelligence.

What is EQ? Emotional intelligence is a complex personal package of interpersonal and self-awareness gifts. Abilities critical to EQ include:

- Self-awareness (clarity about what you are feeling, thinking, wanting/needing including awareness of how your behaviors/emotions impact those around you, self confidence)
- Self-regulation (self soothing under stress controlling disruptive impulses)
- Interpersonal adaptability and social skill-effective leading change and teams; managing relationships effectively with a wide range of personality styles and differences under stress or in conflict.
- Empathy (understanding the emotions of others and skill in treating others according to their emotional reactions)

Social scientist, Daniel Goleman, says, "As a leader moves up in an organization, up to 90% of their success lies in emotional intelligence." Numerous studies affirm his claim.

Having studied and specialized in EQ, I 'm convinced leaders with high EQ create teams and workplace cultures of trust and engagement. An esprit de corps or family culture develops under these leaders. They demonstrate genuine care for their people helping them discover and develop their strengths. When times are difficult,

these high EQ leaders remain composed (vs. losing their heads) and help others handle the emotional ups and downs of workplace life. They demonstrate emotional self-control and can successfully adapt to a wide variety of personalities and challenging conflict scenarios. They can take a difficult position while remaining connected—these are leaders you can disagree with but still respect and trust.

EQ is hard wired in the neural pathways in our brains from early childhood. The determining factor is how the child's caregivers attend to their emotional needs. Some grow up in emotionally overloaded homes while others were taught that emotions are to be stuffed or not expressed. As adults, how we respond (most often unconsciously) to emotional challenge is the result of our lifetime of experiences.

Leaders lacking confidence and competence with conflict struggle because conflict is natural in workplaces. Differences are part of the human experience. But it's very challenging to change life long emotional brain patterns and behaviors; frankly it *isn't easy work*. Emotional intelligence development requires commitment, focus, insight and support from a coach/therapist, learning new skills/behaviors and repetition to re-wire the brain. Emotional intelligence is key to leadership yet few business schools help students master this arena. This isn't surprising because you can't improve EQ by reading a book or case study. Brain re-wiring requires experiential learning.

7 Key Components of an "Emotionally Intelligent" Leader Profile:

1. Self-aware. Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence and is like your internal gyroscope letting you know when you are tilting off balance. You can't respond effectively in stressful situations unless you notice when and how you are emotionally triggered and losing self-emotional control. Self-aware individuals have insight into their emotional patterns and reactive tendencies with others. They are capable of consciously observing and course correcting in the midst of emotional conflict. Individuals without self-awareness are prone to knee jerk impulsive reactions that can be damaging to careers and their leadership effectiveness.

2. Interpersonal radar/Adaptability. The best leaders pay attention to the emotional needs of themselves *and* others. They are "tuned in" without being fused. In other words, they notice the emotionality of others but don't automatically absorb the other's emotional state as their own. These resilient leaders have a wide tolerance for challenging personalities and emotions. They can adapt their management style to the situation and person. Because they aren't self-absorbed, they can display appropriate empathy, compassion and understanding. They are adept at reading and deciphering non-verbal "cues" and moods. For example, they recognize when their team is overwhelmed and respond by setting a slower pace.

3. Genuine Concern for Others. The high EQ leader models genuine compassion for their people. They care about morale, engagement and work/life balance challenges

for those they lead. Because they value their people, they communicate congruently and those who report to them go the extra mile in return.

4. Optimistic While Grounded in Reality. On the continuum from “Pollyanna” to a curmudgeon, the high EQ leader is more positive, optimistic than pessimistic. They don’t suffer from “magical thinking” anymore than they are mired in the negative muck. They help staff see opportunities when they are stuck in negativity by reframing questions to encourage new perspectives. However, they have no problem (or fear) helping direct reports course correct if they believe they are headed for the ditch. Being candid and concrete they can convey tough messages but no flatten people in the process.

5. Inspire trust. Trustworthy leaders are approachable active listeners (I often hear leaders claim to listen well but in my experience, few actually do). High EQ leaders inspire collaboration and gain commitment with an inclusive participative management style. For example, they get input from their staff *before* initiating change because they understand trying to bulldoze change creates negative emotional energy and resistance.

6. In touch with their emotions. High EQ leaders are informed but not *ruled* by their feelings. This is important because feelings provide insight into the importance and meaning of situations/relationships and what action needs to be taken next. For example, feeling fear inspires us to take action to protect our selves. To be blind to one’s emotions is foolish; besides, we don’t check our emotions are the door when we come to work. Leaders who hide emotions with little affect risk being perceived as aloof, uncaring and “out of touch.” If staff can’t read you, they can create their own labels or stories about you.

7. Rudder in the storm. High EQ leaders self regulate and recover quickly from upsets—they don’t “lose it” in workplaces. They have finely tuned internal emotional thermostats they dial into when situations get tough. Even when the heat is turned on high, they can choose how they express their emotions and do so appropriately. Additionally, they pay attention to the emotional needs of their people and again, behave in ways that foster trust.

It’s a rare leader that can’t benefit from EQ executive coaching. Leadership development is a journey of “know thyself” self-awareness. I can help anyone committed—there isn’t a better leadership development investment you can make. EQ it is at the heart of all things in relationship -- it’s as applicable to your personal life as it is to your workplace life. Double bang for your time and buck!

Maureen Moriarty, Executive Coach and Leadership Development Trainer specializes in EQ. She helps leaders and teams improve engagement, trust and performance. She can be reached at 425 736 5691, maureen@pathtochange.com or by visiting her website www.pathtochange.com

