

Emotional Intelligence

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Emotional intelligence is a term that has gained increasing favour as leaders in many workplace settings have come to appreciate the value of the spectrum of ways in which employees contribute to the health and vitality of the organization for which they work. Although intelligence is an essential ingredient for task accomplishment, it is not the only one. Since Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, was published in 1995, professionals have come to understand the central role that emotions play in the quest to "get the job done". Instead of sweeping feelings under the proverbial rug, innovative managers now recognize the pivotal position of emotions in the day-to-day interactions of their employees. Furthermore, these emotional sensitivities can be constructively harnessed to increase productivity and satisfaction.

Conventional western approaches to management have typically valued reason over emotion, individual achievement over collective success, competition over collaboration, hierarchical control over team function, and conflict avoidance over conflict resolution. The introduction and application of emotional intelligence in the workplace is beginning to change all this. Increasingly, managers are learning that emotions can be a positive influence, that teamwork is a critical dimension of success, that collaborative decision making results in better choices, that empowered employees prefer to take responsibility rather than being controlled, and that avoiding conflict ultimately results in more, not less, conflict in the workplace.

Here are ten hallmarks of the emotionally intelligent leader or manager.

1. Non-Judgmental attitude

A non-judgmental attitude towards others, and an ability to bring out the best in them, makes it possible to respect the strengths and talents of employees. The opposite of this is self-righteousness, in which others are viewed with suspicion and blame. When

employees are actively encouraged to do their best in a supportive, non-judgmental environment, everyone benefits.

2. Empathetic perception

Helping others to understand themselves is a natural result of active, empathetic listening. When perceptive managers are sincerely committed to helping their employees learn more about themselves *from their own point of view*, then they are willing to suspend their biases and prejudices long enough to “walk a mile in another’s shoes”. This occurs in contrast to the outmoded, top-down approach of declaring “how things are around here”.

3. Transparent sincerity

Successful leaders are transparent with their honest emotions, needs, and goals. Authenticity in this realm includes appropriate emotional boundaries, so these managers are able to describe feelings and needs but not burden their employees with them. Deceit and duplicitous behaviors have no place here. Rather, managers take responsibility for their own feelings and intentions with visible integrity.

4. Responsible authority

Emotionally intelligent managers take responsibility for problems that arise in their areas of responsibility. They do not procrastinate when issues require attention, or delegate tough decisions to others. Instead, they work with those involved in an open forum to resolve concerns and conflicts. While these managers make it clear that all are welcome to participate in creating constructive solutions, they take full responsibility for facilitating a process that will optimize the best combination of outcomes for everyone, as well as for the final product. They are not afraid to say, “the buck stops here” when it does.

5. Detailed support

Although those in leadership positions must have a firm grasp on the “overall picture”, it is equally important that they comprehend the specific details that will ensure the success of the programs for which they are responsible. This makes it possible to match employees with suitable activities, deal effectively with complex challenges, and separate fact from speculation and rumour. These managers’ ability to remain relevant and support what’s really going on for their employees stands in direct contrast to unfortunate antiquated practices in which leaders hide behind vague statements and abstractions in an effort to dodge supporting the truth.

6. Expressive communication

Expressing oneself in forthright, candid ways while remaining sensitive to how those expressions affect others is another strength of an emotionally intelligent manager. A personable approach encourages others to be equally forthcoming and enthusiastic, which in turn influences workplace relationships in positive ways. When managers share their personal thoughts and feelings, mindful of the relevance of their contributions, they encourage open communication patterns with their employees. Thus they avoid old habits of maintaining distant and impersonal relationships with the people who report to them.

7. Compassionate support

Compassion is the route to maintaining a supportive stance with employees and colleagues. Supportiveness, in turn, creates loyalty and a sense of connection with one another. Managers with emotional intelligence are able to communicate authentic care for others while maintaining appropriate boundaries that are sensitive to issues such as sexual harassment. While old-style leaders act as though they ought to be impersonal, loyalty is actually engendered when employees feel noticed by a manager who demonstrates care about everyone’s health and wellbeing. Following this, when employees know their leaders appreciate them, they are motivated to increase their contributions to the overall effort of the institution for which they work.

8. Conflict resolution

Noticing differences that result in conflict and being prepared to act immediately on those disputes is an important attribute of emotionally intelligent managers. Conflict is inevitable in the workplace. The energy that conflict brings can be channeled in constructive ways so that conditions improve rather than deteriorate. This is only possible, however, when leaders are willing and able to confront conflicting parties with unbiased respect for all interests and a willingness to work through the issues until they are resolved satisfactorily. At times, when managers find themselves in conflict with others, they both recognize other points of view (without necessarily agreeing) and are empowered to speak their truth so that others can understand their perspectives. With warmth and sensitivity, these managers refuse to ignore or avoid conflict with the unrealistic hope that it will disappear. Rather, they welcome diversity of different opinions as a rich source of learning for all employees.

9. Leadership authority

Emotionally intelligent managers enjoy leadership roles and are constantly encouraging others to exercise leadership in their own domains. By modeling healthy leadership behaviors, managers are able to bring out the best in those around them. They take pleasure in helping to create solutions to problems, in having an open mind, and in using their command of resources for the benefit of others. Power is seen as a privilege that is not abused for personal gain or to defend the “turf” associated with one’s position. Rather, authority and respect is earned through consistently healthy behaviors that reflect a willingness to be responsible within a framework of commonly held values.

10. Inspirational confidence

When managers are confident in their own abilities, comfortable with the principles that guide them, and secure in their sense of belonging in their workplace, then they exude those qualities and encourage others to feel the same way. This self-assurance creates an environment within which employees are willing to take risks and achieve a greater measure of their potential. Feelings of anxiety are an inevitable part of exercising

leadership. Rather than hiding behind false bravado or projecting their anxiety onto others, the emotionally intelligent manager accepts this without allowing it to gain the upper hand. Hence, they become beacons of self-confidence in the face of fear, and others look to them for inspiration and guidance.

Adapted from: Ryback, David (1998) Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work: Successful leadership is more than IQ. Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.