

Great Companies Need Great Leaders

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that great leaders deliver better (and in some occasions extraordinary) results but what's the magic sauce to make good leaders great?

Although there is no secret recipe, recent research emphatically concludes that a core differentiator between good and great leaders is that great leaders possess and demonstrate greater levels of emotional intelligence (EI). The research also shows that:

- 80% of the competencies that distinguish outstanding from average leaders are linked to EI
- EI is twice as important in leadership as IQ and technical expertise combined
- EI is four times as important as other factors in terms of overall success
- Close to 90% of success in leadership is attributable to EQ

What's Emotional Intelligence (EI)?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a set of emotional and social skills that collectively establish how well we recognise, understand and manage our own emotions, perceive and express ourselves, establish and manage interpersonal relationships, cope with challenges and uncertainty, and use emotional information in a meaningful way.

Cultivating Emotional Intelligence

In their book *The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success* (Wiley, 2011), the authors Steven Stein and Howard Book identify five key aspects of EI that people can tap into and cultivate. They are:

Self-Perception: The extent to which you are aware of your feelings and your ability to respect and accept yourself the way you are while at the same time having a clear sense of purpose that guides your daily behaviour and actions.

Self-Expression: The extent to which you are able to express your thoughts, feelings and emotions in an open and authentic way and be comfortable standing your own ground while not being overly influenced by group norms or others' behaviour. It's also about standing up for your own personal beliefs and values in an assertive- as opposed to an aggressive- manner and always striving for win-win outcomes.

Interpersonal: This area refers to your people and social skills and the extent to which you relate well to others, how you develop long term mutually beneficial relationships, display empathy and are dependable to those around you.

Decision Making: The extent to which you understand the impact that emotions have on your behaviour and the way you make effective decisions while carefully avoiding any tendency to be impulsive by focusing on long-term goals, objectives and outcomes.



Stress Management: The extent to which you remain resilient in the face of setbacks, adverse events, obstacles, failure, change and unfamiliar or unpredictable circumstances is also a key component of EI as is the extent to which you are open to new ideas and divergent views when under pressure or stressed.

Becoming a More Reflective Leader

Becoming a reflective leader is an important step along the way to becoming a successful and effective leader and it requires some soul-searching questions.

For example, how in touch are you with your feelings and their impact on your behaviour? How comfortable do you feel talking about and controlling your feelings and emotions? How proactive and self-directed are you? Can you effectively can you make objective decisions in emotionally charged situations?

To be a reflective leader you should also ask yourself just how effective you are at developing and maintaining relationships based on trust and collaboration and how effectively do you deal with change? And if change is difficult, what are the challenges and how can you overcome them?

Asking soul-searching questions of yourself can be tough but also important. For example, how do you genuinely feel when you make a mistake and why do you think you feel this way? Are you in control of your life and career if not, why not? What steps do you need to take to re-gain control?

Emotional Intelligence in Business

Based on research by Daniel Goleman, McKinsey & Co. and indeed my own observations, EI in the business world typically manifests itself through nine intertwined characteristics. They are:

1. A strong sense of self-regard, self-empowerment and self-regulation, which together help leaders make better and more timeline decisions and, ultimately, bring people along with them.
2. A positive outlook, promoting constructive responses to changing environments, setbacks, stressful situations and challenges.
3. An awareness of your own and other people's feelings, creating empathy and facilitating better conversations with staff and customers.
4. An ability to connect with people and customers at a deeper level, as leaders are masters at building trust and strong relationships based on empathy, understanding and win-win outcomes.
5. An ability to remain calm and clear thinking in stressful situations.
6. An ability to handle multiple demands while staying focused on goals. These leaders both expect and are comfortable with uncertainty. They flex in response to new challenges and are quick to adjust to sudden changes.



7. Make an effort to recognise different perspectives. Focus on helping everyone find the common ground upon which they can agree. Embrace the opinions of others when charting the way forward.
8. Inspire others by articulating a shared team purpose and aligning it to day-to-day work.
9. Create an atmosphere of co-operation, helpfulness, respect and when appropriate good humour.

Turn the Practices into Rituals

It is important to understand that EI skills can be acquired, learned and improved upon all the time. While it will require some time as well as a few behavioural changes, with some practice and by following some daily rituals, acquiring EI skills and the mindset that comes with it can be achieved by following some or all of the following:

1. Reflect: Expend a minimum of 15 minutes per day reflecting.
What did I achieve today? What did I learn? What do I need to change?
How can I be even more effective tomorrow?
2. Proactively seek feedback from others and treat it as a gift.
3. Tune into how others are thinking and feeling and pay more attention to how they react to your behaviour.
4. Do something that you love or are passionate about every day.
5. Train your brain to think positively and try and banish all negative thoughts.
6. Start a gratitude diary and keep note of the things for which you are thankful.
7. Be courageous and face your fears. Become comfortable with the uncomfortable. Do something every day that stretches you.
8. Smile more, be grateful and practice generosity.
9. Start with an "OK Attitude" in the morning and keep it throughout the day.
10. Treasure and invest in your friends and family.
11. Work collaboratively and always strive for win-win outcomes.
12. Learn to let go of things that drain your energy, including people.
13. Enjoy the simple things in life and laugh a lot more.
14. Don't beat yourself up and play to your strengths.
15. Focus on the things you can control and influence.
16. Make friends with an optimist.
17. Stop using negative language and complaining.
18. Be curious, observe, read, question and learn. Do not take anything for granted.
19. Don't rush into solution mode straight away. Pause and think before you act.
20. Meditate and practice mindfulness.



Call to Action

I would encourage all the readers of this article to start growing their emotional intelligence levels by doing the following three things over the next 12 months (and beyond):

1. Spend 15 minutes every day reflecting on your effectiveness as a leader. Use the questions above to guide your reflection
2. Pay attention and be curious about the 5 EI areas and how they relate to you
3. Develop 3-6 personal rituals. Better still, why not try some of the 20 practices and rituals mentioned in this article?

**Enjoy the journey to becoming a greater leader
and an even happier person!**

