

Leadership-The Smarts That Make The Difference

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What are the skills of a smart leader? There might be as many leadership theories as there are experts, but most agree on what they call the basics, which generally include communication, motivation, self-control, adaptability to change and relationship skills. Without emotional intelligence, a leader is effective in only a limited way or not at all in some of these areas. Let's take a look at why and what it really means to have "smart" leadership skills.

Communication. Theorists say being a good listener is vital to understanding what's going on in a company. The problem is, what is good listening? Emotionally intelligent listening uses awareness and empathy to sense and understand the unspoken emotional agendas that drive behaviors. If I only "hear" that you want better communication I may try to give you more information. If I also "hear" that you don't feel included, or don't feel connected, I can give you the human contact that satisfies and creates inclusion and teamwork. When we listen with all of our senses to really understand how the other feels and what they need, we can respond more appropriately and positively influence outcomes. That is truly effective communication.

To be a more emotionally intelligent communicator try the Stop, Look, and Listen method. STOP what you are doing, and LOOK first at yourself. Examine your emotions and your agendas so you can be present with those you are communicating with. Ask yourself, "What am I feeling? How might that be affecting my thinking and my choices right now? How do I really want to be right now? This will prepare you to listen and speak from a more connected and congruent ground of being. Now, LISTEN with your whole body and all your senses. Try to feel what the other is feeling. Make it your first priority to understand the emotional agenda and then the words and information. Ask questions like "How do you feel about that", to gain clarity and connection. This is a skill that takes practice but has huge payoffs in increased understanding and influencing positive action.

Motivation. Career consultants tell us that people quit not because they are unhappy with their pay, but because they don't feel appreciated. As leaders we need to give people a feeling that what they do makes a difference. If we can tap, their deeper sense of purpose they will be more self-motivated.

Many organizations and managers mistakenly think that recognition and reward programs are effective in making people feel appreciated and should produce positive motivation. But truly emotionally intelligent management uses awareness and empathy to acknowledge each person's

human value and validate their contribution. It's not the cup, or tee shirt, or plaque that makes the difference or even the congratulations at the staff meeting. It is the personal, intimate connection that says, "I see who you are and value you. What you are doing is contributing to my life."

Self-Control. Leaders need to understand that their emotions have a strong effect on their followers, say the experts.

There's a big difference between "control" and "regulation" in dealing with our emotions. Leaders who silently rage while forcing a smile and being "politically correct" create fear, misunderstanding and separation. Leaders who can appropriately and authentically express their anger create respect and trust. "Controlling" our emotions by trying to hide them is as ineffective as acting out our emotions and "taking it out on" somebody else. "Regulating" our emotions would be to recognize that we have them, take responsibility for them and not blame anyone else, not let them consume us but inform us, and express them authentically. For example, "I'm angry about the way we treated that customer. When we fail to give people consideration and respect, I think it is a reflection on me and on the company. It's not OK with me that we treat people like that."

Experts also agree that these pitfalls accompany failed leadership:

- **Ego.** Poor leaders are unwilling to share the limelight, which triggers resentment among followers. "Unless you get the people around you to support you, you're pretty much out there by yourself," says consultant Morris.
- **Arrogance.** Leaders who are full of themselves will ultimately lose the respect of their followers, especially if they ignore or demean others.
- **Complacency.** Unless a manager is leading people toward a goal, they will become disenchanted. Maintaining the status quo hurts morale and is often bad for business.
- **Fear.** People who are afraid or unwilling to take risks will find it hard to act and will likely disenchant followers.

Ego and Arrogance. Overbearing ego and arrogance may only be expressions of a deeper sense of inadequacy and eroded self-esteem. When we increase our self-awareness, we can recognize our feelings of low self-esteem and our negative self-talk. When we also accept ourselves for who we are and allow ourselves to be more vulnerable and authentic, we actually increase our power and influence. People are attracted to vulnerability and intimacy and repelled by arrogance and egotism.

Fear and Complacency. What we may see as complacency and a desire to maintain the status quo is often a fear of being out of control. We learn ways to attempt to control our world early in life to make our environment more predictable and "safe." An emotional intelligent strategy for dealing with change and growth is to feel the feelings and do it anyway. All change and growth involves chaos, which is essential to creativity. When we learn to regulate our own emotions, we don't hide our fear or pretend we are not afraid, but rather acknowledge and contain our fear while accepting ourselves. It's not whether or not you will be afraid but what you do with it. A smart leader acknowledges the fear, takes responsibility, gets new information, solicits support, accesses his or her sense of purpose and takes action.

It is easy to list the things a leader should do. It is not the "doing" that makes the difference, it is the "being." Developing emotional intelligence allows any leader to be more authentic, powerful, available and purposeful. Those are the kind of "smarts" or qualities of being that make the difference. Those are the qualities of leadership that attract and motivate others and increase personal and organizational effectiveness. Remember, It's Not How Smart You Are, It's How You Are Smart.

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