

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Emotional Competency

Effective leaders need to cultivate emotional competency (also called emotional intelligence). They must be comfortable with their own emotions, and those of their employees. They need to be able and willing to respond properly to what their emotions tell them. They should be capable of communicating emotions and inspiring followers.

Human beings tend to glorify thinking because it is something that only humans can do. However, the vast majority of other animal species got by just fine for eons without the capacity for thought by using their emotions as their guide. Emotions are the original evolutionary warning and signaling system, present in both animals and humans. Fear indicates in no uncertain terms that danger is near and strongly motivates retreat. Happiness accompanies the presence of life-enhancing experiences (nourishment, shelter, sex, relationships) and strongly motivates approach. Anger can lead to social or even physical aggression that can be valuable for survival and reproductive success. Emotions motivate behavior in ways that help insure survival.

Although extreme emotion can temporarily interfere with thinking, for the most part emotions help people organize their thoughts and reactions. Emotions help us to prioritize by directing attention to options that have higher survival value. Being happy makes it easier to reason and to be creative. Changes in mood often signal a need to review what is happening around us. Emotions help us remember and can help us in making judgments. In short, the notion that thinking is good and feelings are bad is pure nonsense. While effective leaders do need to be capable thinkers and strategists, and to be able to keep their wits about them when under stress, they also need to be attentive and sensitive to their emotional states. It takes both clear thinking and emotional awareness to make the best-informed decisions.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to recognize and properly identify emotional states in themselves and others. Those who cannot recognize emotional states in others are likely to significantly misjudge people's motivations. The ability to manage emotion in one's self by moderating negative emotions and enhancing positive ones is essential to effective leadership. Leaders who cannot control the experience and expression of anger are condemned to be significantly less effective. Emotionally intelligent leaders can regulate their negative emotions.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are also capable of empathy. They appreciate what other people are feeling and identify with those feelings. They use that understanding to develop strategies for influencing others in the service of the organization and are themselves able to make better judgments based on their insights. Leaders who lack empathy are less effective.

Emotionally competent leaders lead with the heart as well as the head through effective emotionally charged communication that motivates employees. Followers (among the employees) end up matching their emotions to those emoted by their leader, much like a struck tuning fork placed near another will set the other vibrating. Leaders who are unable or unwilling to broadcast emotion will lack followers.

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