

**“Primal Leadership”
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Emotional intelligent leaders get results. We sound a warning about the power of toxic leadership to poison the emotional climate of a workplace.

“The best hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth” ~Erasmus

Great leadership works through emotions. The crucial dimension in leadership—the emotional impact of what a leader says and does. The leader acts as the group’s emotional guide. Followers look to a leader for supportive emotional connection—for empathy. When leaders drive emotions positively, we call this effect *resonance*—drive it negatively *dissonance*.

Leaders can guide in ways that give people a sense of clarity and direction in their work and that encourages flexibility, setting people free to use their best sense of how to get the job done. In any work setting, the sound of laughter signals the group’s emotional temperature.

If you think about the leaders with whom people most want to work in an organization, they probably have this ability to exude upbeat feelings. Optimistic, enthusiastic leaders more easily retain their people, compared with those bosses who tend toward negative moods. The more emotionally demanding the work, the more empathetic and supportive the leader needs to be. Without a healthy dose of heart, a supposed “Leader” may manage—but he does not lead.

Emotionally intelligent leaders build resonance by turning into people’s feelings—their own and others—and guiding them in the right direction. Intellect alone will not make a leader; leaders execute a vision by motivating, guiding, inspiring, listening, persuading— and most critically, through creating resonance.

Max Weber argued a century ago that Institutions which endure thrive not because of one leader’s charisma, but because they cultivate leaderships throughout the system.

Self-aware leaders understand their values, goals and dreams. They know where they’re headed and why.

Given the reality of emotional leakage, a leader’s emotions have public consequences.

Relational management is friendliness with a purpose; moving people in the right direction. Inspirational leaders get people excited about a common mission. They offer a sense of purpose beyond the day-to-day tasks or quarterly goals that so often take the place of meaningful vision.

There are six leadership styles:

1. Visionary
2. Coaching
3. Affiliative
4. Democratic
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5. Pacesetting
6. Commanding

The first four create the kind of resonance that boosts performance, while pacesetting and commanding should be applied with caution.

Visionary leaders articulate where a group is going, but not how it will get there—setting people free to innovate, experiment and take calculated risks. Visionary leaders help people see how their work fits into the big picture. Of the six leadership styles, our research suggests that overall the visionary approach is most effective.

Visionary leaders understand that distributing knowledge is the secret to success; as a result, they share it openly and in large doses. Of all the emotional intelligence (EI) competencies, empathy matters most to visionary leadership. If a manager trying to be visionary instead becomes overbearing, he can undermine the egalitarian spirit of team-based management.

Despite the commonly held belief that every leader needs to be a good coach, leaders tend to exhibit this style least often. In these high-pressure, tense times, leaders say they don't have time for coaching. By ignoring this style, however, they pass up a powerful tool.

People tend to gravitate toward the aspects of their job they like the most, namely, the aspects that tie in to their dreams, identity, and aspirations. By linking people's daily work to these longer-term goals, coaches keep people motivated. Only by getting to know employees on a deeper, personal level can leaders begin to make that link a reality.

Coaches are also good at delegating, giving employees challenging assignments that stretch them rather than tasks that simply get the job done. Leaders who are "Pace-setters" —focused exclusively on high performance—often think they're coaching when actually they're micro-managing or simply telling people how to do their jobs.

Good coaches often ask themselves: Is this about my issue or goal, or theirs? The ongoing development of leadership marks a cultural strength as well as a key to continued success. The coaching style may not scream "Bottom-Line results." But, in a surprisingly indirect way, it delivers them.

Open sharing of emotions is one hallmark of the affiliative leadership style. These leaders tend to value people and their feelings—putting less emphasis on accomplishing tasks and goals, and more on employee's emotional needs. The greatest risk is being out of touch with what's going on. A leader who puts off crucial decisions, hoping to thrash out a consensual strategy, risks dithering.

The pacesetting approach can leave employees feeling pushed too hard by the leader's relentless demands. The result is that morale plummets as employees see their leader as driving them too hard—or worse, feel the leader doesn't trust them to get the job done in their own way. The pressure constricts their talent for innovative thinking.

Although pacesetters may get compliance—and therefore a short term upward blip in results—they don’t get true performance that people will sustain. The absence of empathy, for example, means such leaders can blithely focus on accomplishing tasks while remaining oblivious to the rising distress in those who perform them. Such pacesetting leaders excel at the technical asks of the work they manage but disain the cooperative bent that leadership demands.

By rarely using praise and freely criticizing employees, the commanding leader erodes people’s spirits and the pride and satisfaction they take in their work—the very things that motivate most high-performing workers. We need to give people the sense that their job fits into a grand, shared mission.

In most modern organizations, the do-it-because-I-say-so boss has become a dinosaur. Leaders need to be more of a resource to people rather than merely a rubber stamp. Self-awareness, emotional self-control, and empathy are crucial to keep the commanding style from going off track. Coercive leaders who display not just anger but also disgust or contempt can have a devastating emotional impact on their people.

If the only tool in a leader’s kit is a chainsaw, he’ll leave an organization in shambles. Leaders with gargantuan egos typically have a blinder-like fixation on immediate financial goals, without any regard for long-term human or organizational costs of how they achieve those goals.

The single talent that set the most successful CEO’s apart from the others turned out to be a critical mass of emotional intelligence competencies. Of the abilities conspicuously absent in the SOB-style leader, or course, high on the list are empathy, artful collaboration, and caring about developing the best in people. The number one reason that people cite for quitting is dissatisfaction with the boss. In short, these good CEO’s created a climate where people felt energized and focused, had pride in their work, loved what they did—and stuck around.

When it comes to filling a leadership position, it pays to find someone who has the flexible repertoire of four or more styles that marks the most outstanding leader. We discovered that the higher up the ladder a leader climbs, the less accurate his self-assessment is likely to be.

The crux of leadership development that works is self-directed learning: Intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or who you want to be, or both.

To experience self-directed learning, there are “**Five Discoveries**” the leader needs to make:

1. My idea self—Who do I want to be?
2. My real self—Who am I? What are my strengths and gaps?
3. My learning agenda—How can I build on my strengths while reducing my gaps
4. Experimenting with and practicing new behaviors, thoughts and feelings to the point of mastery
5. Developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible

Real leadership development begins with a holistic vision of one’s life, in all its richness. To achieve improved business performance, leaders need to be emotionally engaged in their self-development. And that requires connecting the effort to what really matters to them.

A personal vision is the deepest expression of what we want in life, and that image becomes both a guide for our decisions and a barometer of our sense of satisfaction in life. The most obvious way to correct distortions in self-perception, of course, would be to receive corrective feedback from the people around us. When people confuse being nice with providing others with accurate observations about their behavior, their feedback is rendered useless.

When others try to keep us comfortable by sanitizing feedback, or “being nice,” they do us a disservice. We’re deprived of crucial information we need to improve. Most emotionally intelligent leaders actively seek out negative feedback as well as positive. Those leaders understand that they need a full range of information to perform better—whether or not that feedback feels good to hear.

Rare are those who will tell a commanding leader he is too harsh, or to let a leader know he could be more visionary, or more democratic. That’s why emotionally intelligent leaders need to seek the truth themselves. They actively seek out negative feedback, valuing the voice of a devil’s advocate. Soliciting negative information may be vital to a person’s continued growth and effectiveness. The leader who wants to strengthen his abilities needs to start by seeking out other people’s perspectives in order to get an accurate picture of himself.

Improvement plans crafted around learning—rather than performance—have been found most effective. The best kind of learning agenda helps you focus on what you want to become—your own ideal—rather than on someone else’s idea of what you should be. When crafting specific, manageable learning goals, it works best to tie them to goals that motivate you and ignite your full range of talents.

Directional or visionary planners, for example, are good at crafting a picture of a meaningful, distant future state—one that’s grounded in values, beliefs, and a deep sense of what’s important in life. What will you say “no” to in order to create the time you need for working on your goals? Too often leadership courses and workshops present a fixed cookie-cutter agenda.

Bring bad habits into awareness, consciously practice a better way, and rehearse that new behavior at every opportunity until it becomes automatic—that is, until mastery has occurred at the level of implicit learning. It’s hard to learn leadership abilities in a classroom.

Great athletes spend a lot of time practicing and a little time performing, while executives spend no time practicing and all of their time performing. The key to learning new habits for leaders lies in practicing to the point of mastery.

In the last decades much research has proved the superiority of group decision-making over that of even the brightest individual in the group. Groups are smarter than individuals only when they exhibit the qualities of emotional intelligence. A leader who isn’t emotionally intelligent can wreak havoc in a team situation.

One of the biggest mistakes leaders can make is ignoring the realities of team ground rules and the collective emotions in the tribe and assuming that the force of their leadership alone is enough to drive people’s behavior. Collective emotional intelligence is what sets top-performing teams apart from average teams. Positive norms will stick only if the group put them into practice over and over again. Being explicit about norms also helps to socialize newcomers into the group quickly.

In self-aware, self-managing teams, members themselves will step up to the plate to instill and reinforce resonant norms and hold one another accountable for sticking to them. Some things are common sense, but unfortunately not common practice.

Some leaders use rigid commanding and pace-setting styles which actually prevent people from telling them the truth. These leaders are clueless, or in denial about the reality of their organizations. While they may believe that everything is fine they have in fact created a culture in which no one dares to tell them anything that might provoke them—especially bad news. That kind of silence can come at a very high price. You don’t want to cause people to lose their competence, confidence and creativity.

If the cultural norms don't support passionate action, innovation, or resonance, leaders will find themselves fighting an uphill battle. People may show up for work, in a body at least, day after day—but they leave their hearts and souls elsewhere. Dynamic inquiry involves focused conversations and open-end questions intended to get at people's feelings. You want people to become aligned with a vision for change—and see how their dreams, and their personal contribution to the change process fit with the big picture.

The creation of a shared language that is based on feelings as well as facts is a powerful driver of change. This shared language provides a sense of unity and resonance. It's important for the leader to use emotional intelligence to observe and interpret the subtle clues about what's really going on, and it offers that leader perspective that goes beyond the data about the company. Tapping into that kind of insight can come more easily if the leader makes a habit of retreating to a quiet place to reflect on a regular basis.

Here are some questions to regularly ask yourself:

- What's bothering me so much that just can't seem to let it go, even at home?
- What's confusing, muddled, ambiguous or just plain irritating?
- Where is the passion, excitement and meaning in my work?
- What do I really believe in?

To create the vision of a company, emotionally intelligent leaders need to move beyond a solo scrutiny of an organization's vision to drawing on the collective wisdom of followers. Getting people to really embrace change requires *attunement*—alignment with the kind of resonance that moves people emotionally as well as intellectually. It requires a direct connection with people's emotional centers. *Attunement*, rather than mere alignment, offers the motivating enthusiasm for an organizational vision. None of us is as smart as all of us. We need to be careful, as too much comfort in relationships can bring discomfort in accountability.

Creating organizations that are emotionally intelligent is ultimately the leader's responsibility. It is up to leaders to help the organization identify its reality—including the cultural norms that hinder it—and then to explore the ideal vision of what could be and to help members of the organization uncover their own roles in that vision.

The overall ratio of resonance to dissonance, we propose, determines that organization's emotional climate and relates to how it performs.

Most people in companies today have not challenged themselves to learn something really different for a long time. Developing a new leadership style often means fundamentally changing how one operates with other people. But the paradox of trying to introduce new learning in organizations makes that a difficult task at best, and not one accomplished in the class-room.

One important way to ensure that learning does feel important is to make it a mandate that the top leader is driving it personally. To succeed, leadership development needs to be the *strategic* priority of the enterprise, an issue that is galvanized and managed at the highest levels—by the executive committee or governing board. For leadership development to succeed, top management needs to demonstrate that commitment comes from the top.

For a new vision to take hold, it must spread throughout every level. Many executive educational programs are simply executive educational classes, focused on engaging people in learning topical content from experts; Strategy, marketing, finance, general management, and similar abstractions. True change occurs through a multifaceted process that penetrates the three pivotal levels of the organization: 1) The individual in the organizations 2) The teams in which they work 3) The organization's culture.

Strong leadership development processes are focused on emotional and intellectual learning, and they build on active, participatory work; action learning coaching, where people use what they're learning to diagnose and solve real problems in their organizations.

The first step is to understand the strategy we will use, then to engage it passionately, while developing a different mindset and new leadership behaviors in order to turn vision into reality.

What leaders must do is find a way to get executives emotionally engaged with each other and with their visions, and see to it that they begin to act on those visions. Raising the collective emotional intelligence of an entire group can have far greater impact than cultivating it only in a given individual within that group.

The higher the rank of those considered "Star Performers," the more emotional intelligence emerged as the reason for their effectiveness. When the comparison matched star performers against average ones in senior leadership positions, about 85% of the difference in their profiles was attributed to emotional intelligence rather than to purely cognitive abilities like technical expertise. Our rule of thumb holds that EI contributes 80-90 percent of the competencies that distinguish outstanding from average leaders—and sometimes more.