

# How Would You Rate Your Emotional Intelligence Lately?

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It's a relevant question for a few reasons. First, as the research Daniel Goleman brought forward two decades ago demonstrated, EQ (emotional intelligence) is a far greater predictor of leadership effectiveness than IQ.

Second—and this is the fun part—emotional intelligence can be *learned*. It's not genetic, and pretty much anyone can get better at it. Your emotional intelligence (or lack thereof) is already affecting far more than you think at work and at home. It explains why:

- You have conflict and when you have conflict.
- People like working with you or don't.
- You never seem to get the promotion you are hoping for—or why you do.
- There is so much drama in your life, or why things go quite smoothly.
- So how emotionally savvy are you?

I personally had a lot of growing to do in emotional intelligence over the years in leadership, and I'm still working on it. Here are 5 EI hacks that can immediately improve your leadership. They have certainly helped improve mine.

## 1. BECOME A STUDENT OF HOW YOU IMPACT OTHERS

Ever wonder what happens when you walk into a room? It's a strange question in some respects because you've never been in a room that you're not in. You impact the climate of every room you're in. In fact, as a leader, you almost always change the climate. But is it for the better or worse?

- Do people tense up when you walk in? Do they clam up? Are they glad to see you? Afraid of you? Thrilled that you're there?
- Is your spouse glad to see you, or does he or she worry you will just have one more thing to complain about when you get home?

Many people have no idea how to honestly answer that question. What makes it even more complicated is the fact that insecure leaders are usually too afraid to get answers to that question. And if you are an angry or defensive leader, I promise you your team is afraid to give you an answer to that question.

If you want to grow in emotional intelligence, though, you absolutely need to know what happens when you walk into the room. You need to become a student of how you impact others.

So, here's the hack. Ask people what it is like to be on the other side of you. Do it openly, and honestly. Don't be defensive. Just *listen*. (I got that question from Jeff Henderson, who preached an incredible series on your impact on others called Climate Change.)

You'll be surprised at what you learn. Want to know what I learned? When I started asking my team about my impact on them a decade ago, one of my direct reports said, "You're Bam-Bam."

Bam-Bam Rubble was a Flintstones cartoon character who, as a toddler, didn't know how strong he was. Apparently, I have a very strong personality. Again, for years I was unaware of that because I had only ever been, well, *me*. But as I asked about my impact on others, my team would tell me that when I walked into a room, eyes would focus on me and I would offer my opinion and basically sway the room. It shut down real discussion.

So, I gave the team permission to call me out on it. And for years, in meetings (or after them) staff would come up and say, "You're being Bam-Bam again." Then I'd apologize and stop.

I made it a point to be a lot more intentional and a lot more frequent in understanding what I was doing. I would ask people before and after meetings what role I should be playing and solicit feedback about whether my level of input was too high or too low. It really helped. Even at home, I regularly ask the question "What's it like to be on the other side of me?" The dialogue that ensues always makes home life better... if you are willing to change.

## **2. PROTECT YOUR TEAM FROM YOUR MOODS**

There is you on a good day. And then there is you on your not-so-good days. Too many leaders make their team pay when they're having a bad day. No one wants to work for someone like that for a long time, especially if they have a lot of bad days. Maybe you can't stop yourself from feeling bad, but you can stop yourself from taking it out on the people around you.

Self-awareness is a big key to emotional intelligence. And so is self-regulation. Self-regulating leaders realize that just because they are upset, they don't need to take it out on the people around them—at work or at home. I know what you're thinking: well, how will I process my frustration? Here is my guess. You will pray a lot more.

By the way, this book by Andy Stanley really helped me get to the root of my emotions. It got to the root of four things we all struggle with as people and as leaders: guilt, anger, fear and jealousy.

## **3. STOP BLAMING OTHERS**

Emotionally intelligent people are not just self-regulated, they're self-motivated. This means they're willing to do things like take responsibility for their actions. If you want to become more responsible, stop blaming others. Blame is the opposite of responsibility.

So, what do you do when things go wrong? When someone lets you down? Or when something beyond your control halts progress? Well, that's when you *assume* responsibility. Even if it's not your fault (which is exactly why you're 'assuming' it). When things go wrong, say this: "I'm the leader. I'm responsible." (My team has heard me say it 1,000 times.)

Often, I may not even have caused the problem. But that isn't the point. I'm the senior leader. I'm responsible. I need to get our team together to figure out how to push past the problem. Often, I say it out loud to remind myself that blame is not an option. So, take responsibility and move forward.

It's amazing how freeing that can be. And it has the side benefit of both rallying your team and having someone who may have been responsible come forward and assume responsibility for a dropped ball. Why? Because nobody blamed them. Good people will often own up rather than run and hide.

#### **4. DROP THE EXCUSES**

Emotionally intelligent leaders take responsibility for everything they did that didn't work out.

- Late for a meeting? Traffic didn't make you late. You made you late. (You should have left earlier).
- Didn't get that report done? Don't say your kid got sick or that you couldn't sleep. All of that may be true, but how does it help? You just didn't get it done.

Poor leaders make excuses. Good leaders make progress. Because (as we've often said around here), you can make excuses, or you can make progress, but you can't make both.

If you stop making excuses, it will do something more than change your standing in the eyes of your colleagues, it will make *you* come to terms with *you*. You will get so honest with yourself that you'll be uncomfortable, which is where real progress comes from. The added benefit? Leaders who own their mistakes eventually make fewer mistakes.

#### **5. DON'T SINK TO THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR**

Another hallmark of emotionally intelligent leaders is their refusal to take shots—cheap or otherwise. When the dialogue sinks to a low level, they take the high road. It can be hard not to refute all your critics or descend to the level to which others sometimes go.

There's a simple quote that reminds me again and again why there's no payoff in taking the low road: *Never wrestle with a pig. You both get dirty and the pig liked it.* That's just true on about a thousand levels. The high road isn't the easy road, but it's always the best road.