

Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence

by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee

Harvard Business School Press, 2002

- The fundamental task of leaders is to prime good feeling in those whom they lead.
- Because the leader's way of seeing things has special weight, leaders manage meaning for a group, offering a way to interpret or make sense of, and so react emotionally to, a given situation.
- Leadership resides not solely in the individual at the top, but in every person at every level, who in one way or another acts as a leader to a group of followers.
- No matter what leaders set out to do, their success depends on how they do it. Even if they get everything else just right, if leaders fail in this primal task of driving emotions in the right direction, nothing they do will work as well as it could or should.
- Followers also look to a leader for supportive emotional connection – for empathy.
- People in groups at work inevitably “catch” feelings from one another, sharing everything from jealousy and envy to angst or euphoria. The more cohesive the group, the stronger the sharing of moods, emotional history, and even hot buttons.
- Not all “official” leaders in a group are necessarily the emotional leaders. When the designated leader lacks credibility for some reason, people may turn for emotional guidance to someone else who they trust and respect. This de facto leader then becomes the one who molds others' emotional reactions.
- Cheerfulness and warmth spread most easily, while irritability is less contagious and depression spreads hardly at all.
- People want to work with leaders who are enthusiastic and upbeat. This is one reason emotionally intelligent leaders attract talented people.
- Emotions are highly intense, fleeting, and sometimes disruptive to work; moods tend to be less intense, longer-lasting feelings that typically don't interfere with the job at hand. An emotional episode usually leaves a corresponding lingering mood: a low-key, continual flow of feeling throughout the group.
- Distress not only erodes mental abilities, but also makes people less emotionally intelligent. People who are upset have trouble reading emotions accurately in other people – decreasing the most basic skill needed for empathy and, as a result, impairing their social skills.
- If something has happened that everyone feels angry about or sad about, the EI leader not only empathizes with those emotions, but also expresses them for the group.
- Although surfacing genuine complaints can clear the air and build resonance, when the person complaining does so with anger, the encounter can easily spiral into emotional toxicity.
- When emotionally flooded, a person can neither hear what is said without distortion, nor respond with clarity, thinking becomes muddled and the most ready responses are primitive ones - anything that will end the encounter quickly.
- Clueless leaders try to resonate in a positive tone, but are out of touch with the unpleasant fact that their subordinates are stuck in a negative emotional register. The organizational reality makes people angry or anxious or otherwise unhappy but the leader remains oblivious and so sends an upbeat message that resonates with no one.
- Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head – feeling and thought – meet.

- Einstein: We should take care not to make the intellect our god. It has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead, it can only serve.
- In today's advanced civilization, we face complex social realities (say, the sense someone isn't treating us fairly) with a brain designed for surviving physical emergencies. And so we can find ourselves hijacked – swept away by anxiety or anger better suited for handling bodily threats than the subtleties of office politics.
- Each of the four domains of emotional intelligence – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management – adds a crucial set of skills for resonant leadership.
- The most effective leaders use humor more freely even when things are tense, sending positive messages that shift the underlying emotional tone of the interaction.
- Institutions that endure thrive not because of one leader's charisma, but because they cultivate leadership throughout the system.
- Primal leadership operates at its best through emotionally intelligent leaders who create resonance.
- No leader, no matter how outstanding, has strengths across the board in every one of the many EI competencies. Still, effective leaders typically demonstrate strengths in at least one competence from each of the four fundamental areas of emotional intelligence.
- Self-aware leaders also understand their values, goals and dreams. They know where they're headed and why.
- Perhaps the most telling sign of self-awareness is a propensity for self-reflection and thoughtfulness.
- Attuning to our feelings, according to neurological research, helps us find the meaning in data, and so leads to better decisions. Our emotional memory banks thus enable us to judge information efficiently. Emotions, science now tells us, are part of rationality, not opposed to it.
- Quite simply, leaders cannot effectively manage emotions in anyone else without first handling their own. How a leader feels thus becomes more than just a private matter; given the reality of emotional leakage, a leader's emotions have public consequences.
- When a person who is perennially upbeat talks with someone known to be confrontational about issues they disagree on, the unflappable person typically ends up calming the irritable one.
- Transparency – an authentic openness to others about one's feelings, beliefs, and actions – allows integrity, or the sense that a leader can be trusted. At a primal level, integrity hinges on impulse control, keeping us from acting in ways that we might regret. Integrity also means that a leader lives his values. Such leaders strike others as genuine because they are not making a pretense of being other than they are. Integrity, therefore, boils down to one question: Is what you're doing in keeping with your own values?
- Social awareness – particularly empathy – is crucial for the leader's primal task of driving resonance.
- Empathy makes resonance possible; lacking empathy, leaders act in ways that create dissonance.
- Socially skilled leaders work under the assumption that nothing important gets done alone.
- Six styles of leadership: visionary coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, commanding are used seamlessly and in different measures depending on the situation.
- 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.
- Of the six leadership styles, our research suggest that overall, the visionary approach is most effective. By continually reminding people of the larger purpose of their work, the visionary leader lends a grand meaning to otherwise workaday, mundane tasks. The result: inspired work.
- A leader who misreads people simply can't inspire them.

- The visionary style does not work when a leader is working with a team of experts who are more experienced than he and who might view a leader expound a grand vision as pompous or simply out of step with the agenda at hand. Or, if a manager trying to be visionary instead becomes overbearing, he can undermine the egalitarian spirit of team-based management.
- Coaching focuses on personal development rather than on accomplishing tasks, the style generally predicts an outstandingly positive emotional response and better results, almost irrespective of the other styles a leader employs.
- By linking people's daily work with their dreams, identity and aspirations, coaches keep people motivated.
- Coaches are good at delegating, giving employees challenging assignments that stretch them, rather than tasks that simply get the job done.
- Coaching will fail when the employee lacks motivation or requires excessive personal direction and feedback – or when the leader lacks the expertise or sensitivity needed to help the employee along.
- Leaders who are also pacesetters – focused exclusively on high performance – often think they are coaching when actually they are micromanaging or simply telling people how to do their jobs.
- When a leader relies solely on the affiliative approach tend to be overly worried about getting along with people, often at the expense of the task at hand. This “anxious” type of affiliation has been found to drive down the climate rather than raise it.
- Affiliative leaders rarely offer constructive advice on how to improve; employees are left on their own to figure out how to do so. That is why this style is often used in close conjunction with the visionary approach.
- Even if a leader has a strong vision, the democratic style works well to surface idea about how to implement that vision or to generate fresh ideas for executing it.
- Drawbacks to democratic style include exasperating, endless meetings in which ideas are mulled over, consensus remains elusive and the only visible outcome is to schedule yet more meetings.
- The best communicators are superb listeners – and listening is the key strength of the democratic leader.
- Pacesetting approach works well when employees are self-motivated, highly competent, and need little direction.
- The drive to achieve in the absence of empathy means leaders focus on accomplishing tasks while remaining oblivious to the rising distress in those who perform them. An absence of self-awareness leaves pacesetters blind to their own failings. The most glaring lack is emotional self-management, a deficit that manifests as either micromanaging or impatience – or worse.
- Peter principle failure: leader who takes over for people when they falter, who can't delegate because he doesn't trust that others can perform as well as he, and who is all too quick to condemn poor performance but stints on praise for work well done. They excel at the technical aspects of the work they manage, but disdain the cooperative bent that leadership demands.
- Commanding style: feedback, if given at all, invariably focuses on what people did wrong rather than what they did well. In short, it's a classic recipe for dissonance.
- Strong tactic that works: attack old culture, not the people.
- When a company requires people to go through a one-size-fits-all leadership development program, participants may simply go through the motions – unless they truly want to learn.
- When a person has been forced to change, the change will vanish once the browbeating ends.
- Reeducating the emotional brain for leadership learning requires a different model from what works for the thinking brain: It needs lots of practice and repetition. The task is doubled – we have to undo

habits that do not work for us, and replace them with new ones that do. That's why motivation becomes crucial for leadership development: We have to work harder and longer to change a habit than when we learned it in the first place.

- Complexity, or chaos, theory states that many processes are better described as abrupt changes rather than as smooth transition. Likewise, in building leadership, sudden, shocking discoveries about our lives may shake us into action, wowing us with a stark truth about ourselves and offering new clarity about our lives.
- People who successfully change in sustainable ways cycle through the following stages:
 - My ideal self – Who do I want to be?
 - My real self – Who am I? What are my strengths and gaps?
 - My learning agenda – How can I build on my strengths while reducing my gaps?
 - Experimenting with and practicing new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery
 - Developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible.
- If we fixate on what's in our way rather than on the powerful image of our ideal life, we are plunged into a pessimistic view that demotivates us and can actually hinder our success.
- When someone tells us what we should be, they are giving us their version of our ideal self, an image that contributes to our ought self – the person we think we should become.
- Over time people may become anesthetized to their ideal selves, their vision becomes fuzzy and they lose sight of their dreams.
- It can be all too easy to confuse the ought with the ideal self and to act in ways that are not authentic.
- A personal ideal vision is not enough. A leader needs a vision for the organization.
- If you are finding that your work, relationships and life in general don't make you feel energized and hopeful about the future, that's a good indication that you've probably lost touch with your real self and could use some insight into the person you've become.
- Vital lies: soothing mistruths people let themselves believe rather than face the more disturbing realities beneath.
- Setting developmental goals that matter takes us from merely contemplating change to making concrete steps that prepare us to change. Our learning goals are a kind of mental rehearsal that pave the way for a change in how we act.
- Managers are all too familiar with goal setting these days. They complain of having to spend too much time planning, with few moments left over to do the actual work.
- It is hard to learn leadership abilities effectively in a classroom. What is needed is practice. The more often a behavioral sequence repeats, the stronger the underlying brain circuit becomes. People literally rewire their brains.
- Some research suggests that managing emotional impulses is real mental work: The stress of the intentional effort to alter one's mood can deplete the energy it takes for self-control.
- Brain studies have shown that imagining something in vivid detail can fire the same brain cells that are actually involved in that activity.
- Open discussion and disagreements about ideas as opposed to attacks on people who hold disparate views sharpen decision making.
- For leaders to extend emotional intelligence throughout their teams and organizations, they need to take a hard look at reality rather than focusing first on an ideal vision.
- As individuals, we feel most motivated to change when we tap into our dreams and ideal visions of our lives. The ideal vision for a group, however, is often a much more distant concept, so it simply doesn't provide enough motivation to instigate change.

- At the team level, social awareness – especially empathy – is the foundation that enables a team to build and maintain effective relationships with the rest of the organization.
- Whenever someone voices a creative idea, the person who speaks next must take the role of an “angel’s advocate,” offering support. That way the prospects are better for the survival of the fragile bud of an idea, insulating the innovative thought from the inevitable criticisms.
- When core values and the teams’ overall mission are clear, and when self-management norms are explicit and practiced over time, team effectiveness improves dramatically, as does the experience of team members.
- I always start by looking not at how I see things, but at how my team members see things. I ask myself, What’s happening with that person? Why is he doing those awful things? What is he afraid of or angry about? Or, what is she excited about, and what makes her feel secure and happy?”
- Emotionally intelligent leaders know that their primal task is to look first to the organizational reality, identifying the issues with the full involvement of key individuals.
- What’s bothering me so much that I 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?
- Strategies speak mainly to the rational brain. Strategic visions are typically linear and limited, bypassing the elements of heart and passion essential for building commitment.
- Getting people to really embrace change requires attunement – alignment with the kind of resonance that moves people emotionally as well as intellectually. The challenge is in how to attune people to your vision and then to your business strategy in a way that arouses passion.
- Rules that trigger change:
 - Focus people’s attention on the underlying issues and solutions to create common ground and understanding about what needs to change and why.
 - Focus on the ideal, combining resonance-building leadership styles to get people talking about their hopes for the future and to tap into the dedication people feel for the organization.
 - Move from talk to action.
- Rules of engagement that will help to create a resonant, emotionally intelligent and effective culture.
 - Discovering the emotional reality
 - Respect the group’s values and the organization’s integrity. (If core beliefs, mindsets, or culture really need to change, people need to drive that change themselves. It cannot be forced, so when people enter into such a change process they need to be personally and powerfully motivated – preferably by hopes and a dream, not fear.)
 - Slow down in order to speed up.
 - Start at the top with a bottom-up strategy.
 - Visualizing the ideal
 - Look inside
 - Don’t align, attune
 - People first, then strategy
 - Sustaining emotional intelligence
 - Turn vision into action
 - Create systems that sustain emotionally intelligent practices
 - Manage the myths of leadership
- By their very nature, organizations don’t readily encourage new learning. Organizations thrive on routine and the status quo.

- Human resource people cannot on their own drive significant change in behavior or culture. The organization's top leaders must be actively involved in any leadership development process.
- Individual leaders alone cannot change a culture. For a new vision to take hold, it must spread throughout every level. You cannot ignore culture and you cannot hope to change it one leader at a time.
- People change when they are emotionally engaged and committed.