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Five Practices to Build Emotionally Intelligent Leaders

Building emotional intelligence in leaders can result in higher return on investments and profitability in organizations.

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Emotional intelligence, or EQ, the capability of individuals to identify and manage their own emotions as well as recognize those of others, has been identified as a strong indicator and predictor of effective leadership. It has been studied and researched resulting in evidence that strongly suggests organizations with emotionally intelligent leaders produce a higher return on investment and profitability. EQ requires effective communication between the rational and emotive centers of our brain — it represents the path between feeling and reason.

As written about by Daniel Goleman in his book, “Primal Leadership, Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence,” the four skills that make up emotional intelligence include: self-awareness and self-management (personal competence) and social awareness and relationship management (social competence). Goleman says “gifted leadership occurs where heart and head — feeling and thought — meet.” Studies have found that EQ is a required competency for effective leaders, EQ is the No. 1 predictor of professional success and personal excellence and EQ affects organizational profitability and performance. Developing emotionally intelligent leaders can start with embracing the following five practices:

1) Develop inner strength: Leadership begins and ends with inner strength, requiring the ability to understand ourselves while consistently learning, growing and pushing in new ways. In addition to enhancing self-awareness, strong leaders are adaptable to their surroundings, transparent, exhibit positive energy and practice emotional self-control. Effective leaders are empathetic, service-oriented and organizationally aware of their surroundings, reading people and cues. They are agile and can adjust their approaches and responses based on the situation and needs of others. Lastly, they are relationship builders, inspiring others, influencing effectively, coaches, people developers, team collaborators and can manage conflict and change. All of these are dimensions of emotional intelligence. Ongoing self-assessment and exploration are key to leveraging strengths as well as creating development plans for growth.

2) Create a culture of compassion: Employees need to feel valued, appreciated and acknowledged for their contributions. Showing vulnerability and compassion is a sign of strength and creates an environment of trust. Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn, discussed his own transformation and appreciation for the power of compassion as a foundation of leadership in his organization. He shared the impact of creating a culture of compassion that guides all decisions,

even the difficult ones, resulting in a higher level of transparency, credibility and outcomes that are mutually embraced. Building credibility, trust and respect are foundational to creating a culture of compassion where everyone feels valued, heard, included and considered.

3) Enhance relationship building across levels and functions: Open communication and establishing, building and nurturing long-lasting relationships is essential. Connecting with individuals cross-functionally and within other locations and geographies should be expected and encouraged. Engaging across, up and down should be a common standard that is supported with resources and tools to do so effectively. When we provide a venue for this kind of deep and rich relationship building, it creates a platform and norm-enabling social competence to be developed and mastered. Leaders role-model these behaviors to encourage and exhibit relationship building throughout the organization and externally within the community and industry.

4) Encourage and invest in continuous learning: Working with leaders to understand and build their level of EQ also develops their capacity to role-model behaviors that will empower and enable others to unleash their own leadership skills, resulting in a strong talent pool. Great leaders are life-long learners always looking to further develop their knowledge, competencies and skills. In fact, there are a number of assessments that help determine our level of emotional intelligence, allowing us to identify elements of strength and areas for improvement, including the highly regarded Bar-On EQ-i self-assessment and 360 tool. There are also several resources available on this topic including the book, “Emotional Intelligence 2.0” by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves. Leadership is a journey and extraordinary leaders are always working on continuous learning for themselves and enabling others to learn, grow and realize their potential. They encourage and invest in their talent because they believe they are their greatest asset.

5) Reinforce qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure outcomes: Learning organizations appreciate the value of data analytics to make the business case to support development initiatives. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, the three most significant causes of career derailment for executives involve deficits in emotional competence: difficulty handling change, inability to work well in a team and poor interpersonal relations. According to Tony Simons of the *Harvard Business Review*, the more associates feel trust in their bosses (an emotional response), the higher the profits. In one study, a 1/8-point improvement on a survey of employees perceptions of how much managers earned their confidence increased profitability by 2.5 percent. That increase in profitability meant a quarter-million-dollar profit increase per business unit per year.

Building EQ is not only a strong predictor of effective leadership, it can also contribute to greater productivity, performance and ultimately profitability. Invest in developing your staff and your leadership potential at all levels of the organization. Individuals do not have to be in leadership roles to be leaders. Invest in your talent and unleash leadership skills in all.



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