

LEADERSHIP

# Developing Leaders of Character with Emotional Intelligence

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Leaders are expected to lead with integrity and role model positive behaviors for others to emulate. Leading with a noble purpose is much easier when times are good, but when times are challenging, or when things get emotional, that is when it becomes much more difficult to lead with that noble purpose. Emotions are often seen as disruptive and interfering with performance. Therefore, one view of leadership is to check one's emotions at the door and to try to limit their influence on behavior. However, our view is different. We posit that emotions can help leaders think and make good decisions (Yip & Cote, 2012) and forms the basis of building quality relationships (Lopes, Salovey, Côté, & Beers, 2005; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). Harnessing emotions in a productive manner takes a very high level of skill, a skill that many leaders are not taught, thus, many opt to ignore them. Since emotions are

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embedded in every individual, team and organization, that is not a choice a leader should make. Instead, leaders should choose to develop emotion-based skills, or to develop the skills of what is known as emotional intelligence (EI).

**Basis for Emotional Intelligence**

Leaders use data to make critical decisions every day. They may use field intelligence, policy manuals and standard operating procedures as a basis for decision making. Effective leaders use all relevant data - including emotions, to make decisions. Consider, for example, someone demonstrating concern in what you are saying as opposed to someone who displays agitation. That’s a data point for you to consider. Emotions have causes and if we overlook them, we are missing important data. At the same time, emotional intelligence does not mean you always “go with your gut” as such an approach could be disastrous. Instead, we emphasize that only highly emotionally intelligent people, once they have analyzed that “gut” feeling and determined that the feeling is indeed an emotion, include the data of that emotion into their decision making.

Another fundamental premise of the ability model of emotional intelligence is that all emotions can be “smart”, that is, emotions can assist thinking. Figure 1 represents a simplified version of this notion. Rather than a focus on happiness, the ability model stresses the

*While it’s important for leaders to create an overall positive climate it’s neither possible, nor desirable, for leaders to focus on the happiness of their team all the time.*

need to match the task to the emotion or the emotion to the task. There are times when anxiety is what is needed in a situation and times when happiness is not. While it’s important for leaders to create an overall positive

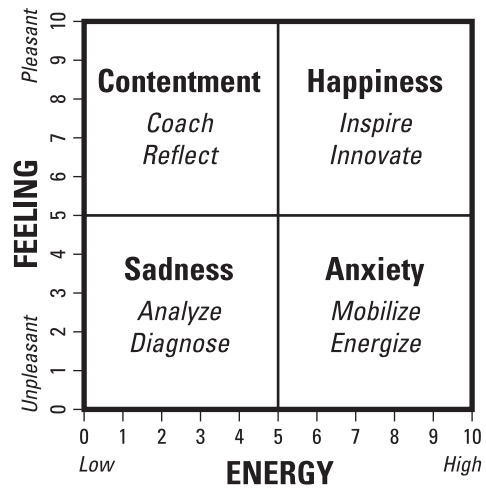


Figure 1: How emotions may facilitate thinking (Adapted from Caruso & Rees, 2018).

climate it’s neither possible, nor desirable, for leaders to focus on the happiness of their team all the time.

**What Emotional Intelligence Is and What It Is Not**

Many leaders have read about, and may have even received training, in EI. But what leaders read and how they are trained is problematic since EI has come to mean many different things over the last 30 years. In this article, we focus on the ability model of EI (for a general overview see Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). However, it

is important to note many, if not most practitioners, focus on non-ability models they often refer to as “EQ” for emotional quotient. The non-ability approach typically includes a selection of standard personality traits such as optimism and

assertiveness or traditional leadership competencies such as influence and conflict management (see Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000 for a discussion of different approaches to emotional intelligence). While optimism

is an important trait and predicts outcomes, clearly it has little or nothing to do with intelligence. Thus, some people refer to EQ and sometimes to EI as one of the “non-cognitive” skills or traits. In the ability model, emotional intelligence is considered a “broad” intelligence, one related to general intelligence (“g”) or IQ. All intelligences should be positively related according to the Cattell-Horn-Carroll model of intelligence (Carroll, 1993) and data support that EI, defined and measured as an ability, is indeed a broad intelligence (MacCann, et al., 2014). Therefore, it is possible to hire and promote people who are smart in the traditional sense and who also possess a high level

of emotional intelligence. The challenge is finding a leader who possesses both.

The ability model of EI was first proposed by Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer in 1990 and revised in 1997. The 1997 revision suggests that EI consists of four, related abilities: perceive, facilitate, understand and manage emotions which are defined in Table 1 (after Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In general, the model is developmental, in that one develops these abilities moving from perceive to facilitate to understand to manage.

Ability	Related Skills
Perceive (Map)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceive emotions in self and others</li> <li>• Perceive emotions in the environment</li> <li>• Accurately express emotions</li> <li>• Differentiate genuine emotion expressions from “fake” expressions</li> </ul>
Facilitation (Match)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate emotions to facilitate emotional connection with another person</li> <li>• Emotions prioritize thinking and direct attention</li> <li>• Facilitate perspective-taking by leveraging changes in moods and emotions</li> <li>• Select emotions which best facilitate type of problem solving</li> </ul>
Understand (Meaning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine the meaning and causes of moods and emotions</li> <li>• Understand how emotions may change over time</li> <li>• Accurately label emotions</li> <li>• Recognize cultural differences in the evaluation of emotions</li> </ul>
Manage (Move)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay open to both pleasant and unpleasant emotions to determine the information they convey</li> <li>• Manage one’s own emotions to achieve a goal</li> <li>• Manage other’s emotions to achieve a goal</li> <li>• Develop strategies to maintain, decrease or increase an emotion</li> </ul>

Table 1. The Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

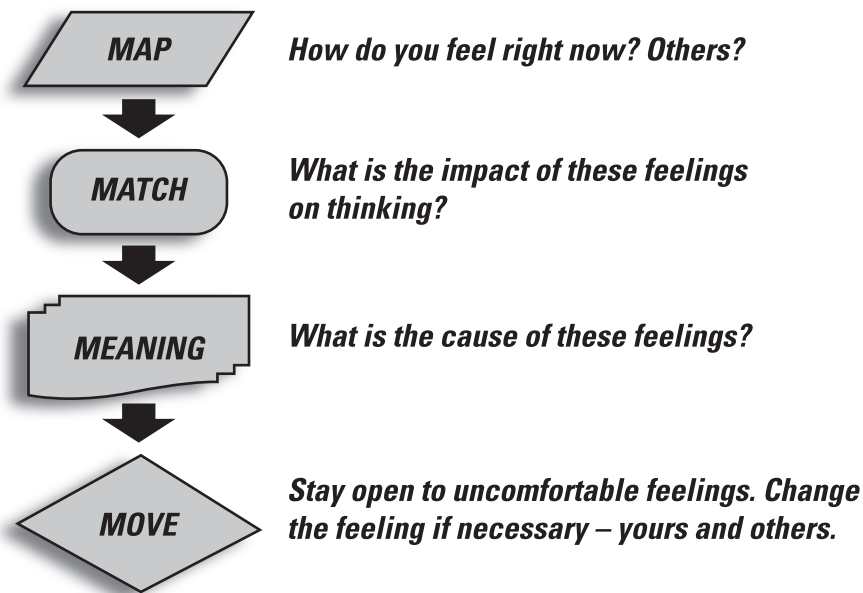


Figure 2: The Emotional Intelligence Blueprint (Adapted from Caruso & Rees, 2018)

### The Four Hard Skills of Emotional Intelligence at Work

Learning and practicing emotional intelligence is relatively easy and straightforward. We developed an EI Blueprint and to make the terminology more memorable, use the alliterative terms Map, Match, Meaning and Move to describe the four EI abilities (perceive, facilitate, understand and manage).

To demonstrate the EI blueprint, let's use a common leadership challenge – leading change. The scenario: You have been asked to lead a project your supervisor feels is critical to the future success of the operation. The goal is to ensure your staff understands the mission, commits to action and collaborates closely with each other and other organizations. Keeping the goal in mind, let's walk through the Blueprint (see Figure 2).

**Map** - How are you and others feeling? You understand the project's importance to your leaders

and perhaps feel nervous, anxious or even worried. Perhaps your boss is feeling the same. You know your staff is overwhelmed with work and a new project may make them feel frustration or even disgust that another project was placed on their already full plate.

**Match** - To prepare for the meeting you need to set the right tone. You recognize that feeling nervous or worried in front of your staff isn't helpful and you want to generate more pleasant emotions such as interest, anticipation, pride and even excitement. You also care about your team and will use emotions to demonstrate your support of them.

**Meaning** - You understand why your staff is feeling the way they do as recent budget cuts have made them do more with less. This project could potentially break the bank and the spirit of your team. You know them well enough to know what will inspire and motivate them to embrace this new project and see it through to its successful end. You also know they trust you

and will be candid with their feedback – something essential to the success of the project.

**Move** - As the leader you deliberately behave in an emotionally intelligent manner - carefully engaging in moving your emotions and those of your team to set the best tone to achieve the task. You will notice how the team is collaborating, communicating and progressing, always ready to step in to help move the team in the right direction. Sometimes you move emotions just slightly, a bit of a course correction. Success at engaging with emotions also enhances your ability to stay open to emotions, allowing you to gather vital emotional data on how the team is functioning.

The EI Blueprint can be used in any situation to better navigate challenging situations. The Blueprint approach can be embedded in the daily practice of leadership; it does not require a separate meeting, conversation or training. This approach does not require extra time but it does require the development of the underlying skills and practicing those skills under pressure.

### How to Assess EI

A leader may wonder if they are emotionally intelligent. We could use typical approaches to measure EI such as self-report questions. However, as an intelligence, EI should and can be measured objectively and the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is one such objective measure (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2002). Comprised of 141 questions covering the four domains of the EI ability model, the MSCEIT's answer key was developed by polling international emotions researchers. The MSCEIT yields a total score as well as four ability scores (although support for a 4-factor structure has been inconsistent). As in any assessment, the MSCEIT has its weaknesses. For example, the MSCEIT lacks a veridical scoring system, may not measure 4 separate abilities and may not adequately measure the ability to accurately perceive emotions (see Joseph & Newman, 2010; Maul, 2011;

Rode, et al, 2008). Despite these limitations, it is the only multi-dimensional ability measure of emotional intelligence which yields an objective assessment of a person's actual level of emotional intelligence.

One of the many challenges for leaders and aspiring leaders is choosing an assessment that offers an accurate estimate of their level of emotional intelligence. Most people tend to overestimate their EI and the more one overestimates, the more likely they are to question the validity of their results, the relevance of the skills, and are less likely to express interest in developing these skills (Sheldon, Dunning & Ames, 2014). The problem with overestimating one's level of emotional intelligence goes back to the idea of emotions as data. What if you believe your subordinates "bought in" on your idea but, in reality, they (non-verbally) expressed significant reservations? What if you believe you are connecting with others and helping your staff manage difficult situations but are being seen as lacking empathy or ineffective in dealing with interpersonal conflict? Obtaining an objective measure of a leader's emotional intelligence can be a powerful way to enhance self-awareness and given its focus on skills, can also provide leaders with a development plan to enhance those skills or develop compensatory strategies. One of the recommendations made by Sheldon, Dunning and Ames (2014) to reduce the defensiveness of test takers to feedback is to eliminate various "escape routes." These escape routes include focusing on behaviors or skills the test taker can develop rather than fixing their "character" or "competence" as well as discussing the test taker's impressions of the assessment before providing feedback. In our practice, we find using the language of hypothesis testing increases openness. We found that using test data to formulate questions such as "have you ever misread someone?" can reduce defensiveness, followed by questions such as "and what are the implications of misreading someone?" and also, use language such as "the data suggest you may misread people at times, has that ever happened?" rather than making statements about their character such as "you

misread people at times” or “the data suggest you are not good at reading people”.

### Why EI is Important

First, we wish to stress why EI is not important. In the popular view, “EQ” is critically important and intelligence less so (e.g., Gibbs, 1995). While correlations between measures of intellectual ability and performance (for example SATs, GREs, etc.) tend to be small, people conclude that intelligence does not predict important outcomes. The problem with this conclusion is there is a restriction of range, that is, you require a minimum SAT score to get admitted into college or the academy. Once you start operating within such an elite environment, IQ is not a great differentiator since everyone is at a certain level of intelligence. Therefore, other skills, EI included, become more important in differentiating high from low performers.

Here, then, is why ability EI matters. First and foremost, managers who score higher on the MSCEIT are slightly more likely to achieve their goals, the “what” of performance. This is key because we all have a role to fill and goals to achieve. However, the same study (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005) demonstrated that the EI of these managers predicted, at a much higher level, “how” they achieved those goals: by communicating and mentoring. In other words, managers higher in EI achieve their goals and do so with character. Second, emotionally-intelligent leaders may make better decisions. People higher in EI, specifically, those who understand the cause of emotions, are more likely to ignore irrelevant moods and make better decisions (Yip & Cote, 2012). Additionally, people who are emotionally intelligent tend to have better quality relationships, are better able to cope with stress and have higher leadership potential than people lower in EI (see Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008 for a review).

Any intelligence can be used for good or bad and EI may not be an exception. In a study of the “dark side” of

EI (Côté, et. al., 2011), some people skilled in emotion regulation, and who scored high on Machiavellianism, were more likely to use EI to create negative work environments. However, people who scored high on emotion regulation and morality were more likely to engage in more prosocial behavior, leading to a more cohesive workplace.

### How EI Skills Can Be Developed

Most leaders understand the importance of EI and want to learn and develop their EI skills. There are vendors, instructors and coaches who claim you can readily increase EI. However, there exist few peer-reviewed studies addressing this issue and those that do exist tend to use small samples (e.g., Crombie, Lombard, & Noakes, 2011; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009). Our focus is not on increasing one’s test scores but instead on enhancing skills and developing compensatory strategies through coaching and practice. For example, someone low in spatial intelligence can learn to use GPS to navigate their way to a new location. The effectiveness of compensatory strategies can be seen in the study mentioned earlier (Yip & Cote, 2012), where the advantage of higher EI was eliminated when people were given information about the source of their feelings. Even if a person possesses lower EI, they can still be extremely effective reaching goals with proper support and skills development.

Another compensatory strategy has to do with mapping how others feel. We are advocates of not asking the typical “how are you” question which usually results in a non-informative “fine”, “okay”, “good” or even “great.” Since your decisions and the EI Blueprint depend on getting good baseline data, instead of asking “how are you?”, try more pointed ones such as “what’s on your mind today?”, “what concerns do you have?” or the tiered approach of “how do you rank this decision on a 10-point scale?” followed by “and what would it take to get to a 10?” On the off-chance the reply from a subordinate to the first question is a



dutiful and respectful “10”, you could follow-up with “what 3 reasons support your answer?” and “what one thing would you do differently if it was your decision or plan?”

### How EI May Help Develop Leaders of Character

As stated previously, great leaders integrate EI into their leadership every day and when practiced, EI can help develop leaders of character. The Air Force Academy defines a person of character as someone who (1) Practices their core values of integrity first, excellence in all we do, & service before self; (2) Lifts people to their best possible selves; and, (3) Elevates performance toward a common and noble purpose. In this section we share our thoughts on how EI helps demonstrate behaviors that reflect a leader with high moral character.

*Practice core values.* It’s easy to live your values when everything is going well, but when things become stressful, the ability to demonstrate those values is tested. Recognizing the source of one’s feelings and being able to identify irrelevant moods helps leaders focus on the “signal” of what is really happening and blocks out the distracting “noise.” Practicing core values requires engaging in emotion management when values and behaviors collide, as well as managing emotions that can make us feel uncomfortable, such as sadness, anger and fear.

*Lifts people to their best possible selves.* The ability to understand the source, causes and trajectory of emotions provides leaders with keen insight into others. The ability to connect with others on an emotional level – another core EI skill – allows leaders to have emotional empathy for followers. Understanding emotions provides cognitive empathy – understanding emotions of others – to motivate others. Just as leaders

face setbacks and stressors, so do their followers. A leader who is an expert at managing emotions of others offers strategies to help followers cope with stressors so they can carry out their mission.

*Elevates performance.* As we noted earlier, leaders higher in emotional intelligence achieve their goals and do so with integrity. They show care and concern for their employees. They know how to motivate and connect to others. And they successfully cope with challenges and strong emotions to inspire confidence and foster trusting relationships.

### Integrate EI into Your Leadership

Achieving an organization’s mission is a leader’s primary duty. Intelligence in solving challenges and reaching goals is critical and undeniable in importance. Emotions, leveraged intelligently, can help leaders make better decisions and be exemplary role models. While feelings are not always facts, emotions are a form of data and great leaders incorporate all sources of data

*Great leaders integrate EI into their leadership every day and when practiced, EI can help develop leaders of character.*

when making important decisions. Therefore, leaders should strive to integrate EI in their leadership.

Practicing EI should not be a separate aspect of leader behavior but part of what excellent leaders do every day. Here are simple ways to integrate EI into everyday work:

- Map Emotions – Check in with yourself and others to see how people are feeling before you initiate an important conversation.
- Match Emotions – If people are experiencing helpful emotions for the topic at hand, continue with the discussion, continually

monitoring any shifts in emotions that are not helpful.

- Meaning of Emotion – Emotions have causes. When people express emotions – especially stronger emotions such as anger, fear or sadness, find out why. Addressing the source helps reach goals faster.
- Move Emotions – You are a role model and you need to decide when and how to express emotions. Consider what emotions are needed in challenging situations and move emotions to where they need to be.

Organizationally, EI can be readily embedded into all aspects of leader development. The Blueprint can be used to help solve challenging leadership problems. After-action reviews of those leadership challenges using the Blueprint can help better identify the problem and allows for possible tweaks to solutions. As leaders develop these skills, they can be taught to use the Blueprint and the four EI skills prospectively. All forms of development can embed the Blueprint and EI skills to enhance training outcomes. For example, a mood check-in at various points and intentional management of participants' emotions could result in better training outcomes. As mentioned earlier, the good news is developing emotional intelligence skills is relatively straightforward. However, practicing it is less simple, especially in stressful circumstances, when EI is needed the most. Next time you have a difficult decision to make, deliberately, purposefully and intelligently consider the role of emotions. Ask yourself - how am I and others feeling about this situation, what emotions are more helpful to achieve our goal, what caused us to feel this way and how do we effectively manage our emotions to achieve the best outcome? The answers will help leaders better live the values of character and lead the way for others to follow.

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