

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ARTICLE

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The telephone call I received from a leader I worked with was nothing short of crazy. He was massively triggered, and I listened to a tirade of thirty-five minutes where I could not get a word in edgewise. He just went on and on. He had been triggered, and rather than asking me any questions to clarify, had made some crazy assumptions and made equally crazy assertions and accusations. And his response was totally out of proportion to what had actually occurred. He was having an *amygdala hijack*, and it was not the first time...or the last.

I chose not to go into work the next day, which made him all the angrier as I had "ghosted him." Everything was my fault; he was sure of his "facts" and "conclusions." Actually, he didn't have a clue! My infraction? I had told him what was going on in the business. Not my opinion, actual facts. He didn't like them and took his angst, frustration, and insecurity out on me. Unfortunately, episodes like this are all too common among leaders.

Have you ever worked for a leader who struggled to regulate their emotions, leaving damaged relationships in their wake? Or have you struggled with your emotions when things were not going how you wanted them to? This is a common issue for leaders, even smart ones, because your emotional intelligence is more important than your IQ. High IQ does not make up for low EQ.

The term Emotional Intelligence and its components was pioneered by Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., who authored the bestseller *Emotional Intelligence* and co-authored *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*.

Goleman suggested that an individual's emotional intelligence (EQ) mattered more than their intelligence (IQ) because an individual with good EQ was better equipped to understand themselves and how they are perceived by those around them, and has the social skills to negotiate healthy relationships. He suggested that there were

five components to emotional intelligence:

Self-awareness - the ability to recognize and understand your moods and emotions and how they impact others.

Self-regulation - the ability to control your emotions, impulses, and moods and think before acting. If self-awareness is the ability to understand one's emotions, self-regulation is the ability to control those emotions in how one behaves.

Internal (or intrinsic) motivation - having an inner drive to pursue goals for personal reasons rather than because of some external motivation or reward. Our motivation has to do with deep inner core values that inform our actions.

Empathy - the ability to understand the motivations of others, the reasons for those motivations, and to put oneself in their shoes. If self-awareness is about understanding ourselves, empathy is about living with an understanding of others.

Social skills - the ability to manage relationships, connect and collaborate with others, manage conflict, build healthy networks, and forge healthy relationships.

Think about this: When leaders get into trouble, it almost always involves the flip side of these components of emotional intelligence. Leaders who are not self-aware have little understanding of how their words and actions impact those around them, often creating significant pain. My guess is that we have all experienced those instances ourselves.

Leaders who do not have self-regulation and cannot control their emotions say and do hurtful things to those around them. I ended up resigning from the leader I described above, who could not control his emotions and therefore his words and actions.

“An amygdala hijack is a situation where the amygdala, a small, almond-shaped structure in the brain responsible for processing emotions like fear and anger, takes control, leading to an immediate and overwhelming emotional response.” ([Study.com](https://www.study.com)).

This is the leader who cannot control their anger and whose response is far greater than the situation merits. In that flood of emotions and fear or anger, things are said that are damaging, people are hurt unnecessarily, and the recipient is left wondering what happened and that they were the subject of a tirade of angry words and accusations. Countless people have encountered this from supervisors. Even when there is an apology after (a good thing), it does not repair the damage done in the heat of emotion, where a leader cannot manage and regulate their emotions. (see Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, 10th anniversary edition, Chapter 5, Passion's Slaves).

When leaders lack empathy, they are unable to understand the perspectives and concerns of others. So, for instance, the sales executive who overpromises services to clients to look good and gain the sale at the expense of the staff who must fulfill those promises—leaving them unable to do so and the bad guys for not doing so and then blaming the staff for the resulting fallout—has an empathy deficit that impacts those around them.

One sure sign of a lack of empathy is leaders who rarely, if ever, ask questions of staff but simply make statements and demands. Empathy means that I care about how my decisions and actions impact those I work with, which naturally requires dialogue and an inquiring mind to understand the perspectives, needs, and wisdom of others. Leaders with empathy ask good questions, listen carefully, and seek to find solutions that work for all. Leaders who are defensive, don't listen to staff, or take their concerns into account have an empathy deficit that hurts the culture of many organizations.

These are leaders who cannot manage their egos or emotions. Empathy is about others and understanding their concerns. Ego and empathy are incompatible, while humility and empathy are friends. If you struggle with these issues, get help so your leadership is not toxic but healthy. Unhealthy leaders hurt those around them while healthy leaders lift up those around them. A sign of dishealth is uncontrolled anger, which results in hurtful words and actions.

As you reflect on the five elements of Emotional Intelligence above, which are you strong in, and which do you need to focus on?