

Leading in Tough Times -Is there a Place for the Emotionally-Intelligent Leader?

Deirdre Murray and Daire Coffey, co-authors of “EQ - A Leadership Imperative,” (part of the Management Briefs Series), outline 5 winning ways to lead with emotional intelligence in these challenging times:

“Emotional capitalists represent leaders with the advanced capacity of being able to guide people to action from within by engaging the prime movers of behaviour - emotions.”

Dr. Martyn Newman

In today’s tough environment, do we revert back to the ‘*command and control*’ style of leadership to manage this crisis, or is there a need for leaders to continue to engage ‘*hearts and minds*’ along the difficult road ahead?

Today’s leader is faced with constant change and the increasing challenge of doing more with less. Our economy, while catching sight of small, ‘*green shoots*’ trying to edge their way through the thick, cakey rubble, has a long way to go. Ireland has not only to manage its own budget deficit and the billions in loans from Irish Banks, subsumed into NAMA (The National Management Agency), it is also obliged to support lending within the eurozone to the tune of another €7.5bn.

We’re truly in a crisis and often this scenario calls for leaders who can ‘*step to the plate*’ to get us through tough times. Leaders are faced with an onerous task in front of them: cutting operation costs, managing daily cash flows with a microscope, trimming margins and severing headcount, as well as seeking to retain loyal customers and winning new business in innovative and creative ways.

This task-focused activity, while absolutely critical, can often override the human factors involved. People’s lives have been decimated, one or two-parent families may be jobless, mortgages remain unpaid, crèche fees are now a luxury and people are left with a sense of uncertainty and lack of hope for the future.

Outstanding leaders are not only highly competent at *what* they do but *how* they do it. They are emotionally-intelligent leaders. Emotional Intelligence, (EQ), is the “*difference that makes the difference*” and is even more critical to steer us through tough times.

We outline 5 winning ways to help you lead with emotional intelligence in facing the tough challenges ahead:

1. Be authentic

Emotionally-intelligent leaders are able to remain optimistic and resilient even in the face of setbacks. They are authentic and take responsibility especially when times are tough. However, that does not mean trying to emulate someone else's style that is not your own. Amgen CEO and President Kevin Sharer, who gained experience working as Jack Welch's assistant in the 1980s, saw the downside of people wanting to model GE's strong charismatic leader. *"Everyone wanted to be like Jack,"* he explains. ***"Leadership has many voices. You need to be who you are, not try to emulate somebody else"***

Emotionally-intelligent leaders act authentically in everything they do. They are highly aware of their own personal leadership style and the impact their behaviour has on others. At the same time, they are able to adapt their behaviour depending on the context of the situation they are faced with and in their relationships with others. ***They are "authentic chameleons" and can readily adapt to deal with the context and situation they are faced with*** (Goffee and Jones, 2006).

Leaders must create an environment where people can see leadership by example. As Bill George tells us, *"If there are sacrifices to be made - and there will be - then the leaders should step up and make the greatest sacrifices themselves. Crises are the real test of a leader's True North"* (George, 2007). When Carlos Ghosn was faced with a difficult turnaround situation in Nissan in 2000, he was the first to accept full responsibility by announcing that he would resign if the change programme was not effective. Through his direct involvement and engagement with staff on the ground, he was able to minimise resistance to change and get the company back on track.

2. Articulate a Compelling Vision:

Emotionally-intelligent leaders not only require the competence and strategic foresight to handle these complex problems but must also have the ability to clearly articulate and engage people with a compelling vision and values to help them succeed, especially in tough times.

Many leaders are promoted on the basis of their technical competence but if they are unable to engage and communicate in an open and transparent way with their teams, they are doomed to fail. Ronald Heifetz, in his book, *'Leadership with No Easy Answers,'* argues that the ***real heroism of leadership involves having the courage to face reality and mobilising others to tackle tough challenges*** (Heifetz, 2004).

When President Barack Obama stepped up on the podium in Chicago’s Grant Park, on a crisp, November evening in 2008 to address the vast audience before him, he spent only the first 7 minutes talking about his campaign. In the remainder of his address, he was able to tap into the emotional needs of the American people and urge them to support change, “**Yes, we can!**” Obama clearly demonstrated the ability to provide clarity and hope in times of adversity. **EQ is about inspiring and tapping into people’s values so that they want to move towards the new vision with you.**

3. Create an Environment in which People can Succeed:

In times of crisis, people are unsure and uncertain about their future and this may result in a dip in their performance levels. Successful leaders clarify objectives and expectations and provide an environment which enables people to work to their full potential, by encouraging and supporting them to be at their best. Leaders must enable their teams to work at their best and empower them with the responsibility and authority to make decisions about things that directly affect them.

Goffee and Jones, (2006), pointedly ask, “*Why should anyone be led by you?*” and wait for knees to shake! They firmly believe that leaders cannot operate without the commitment and loyalty of their followers. In their studies, they identified **4 key elements** that followers want from leaders:



Source: Adapted from Goffee and Jones, (2006), ‘*Why Should Anyone be Led by You?*’

- **Authenticity:** *there's no point trying to emulate someone else - lead authentically and be yourself*
- **Significance:** *provide meaning and significance in the work people do*
- **Excitement:** *inspire passion and enthusiasm to follow a shared vision*
- **Community:** *create an atmosphere of camaraderie and trust*

***Side panel shaded

“Leadership must always be viewed as a relationship between the leader and the led.”

Goffee and Jones, (2006)

4. Connect on an Emotional Level with your Employees:

As many staff at this time watch their friends and colleagues pack their cardboard boxes and take their beloved yucca plants out of the office, they can feel like ‘survivors’ rather than employees. The leader must recognise their pain, understand and empathise with what they are going through and be able to motivate and inspire them to rebuild the company for the future. As Daniel Pink tells us, **there is now a clear shift from ‘left brain’, logical and analytical abilities, to an increasing focus on ‘right brain’ skills such as inventiveness, empathy and instilling meaning and purpose among employees (Daniel Pink, author of ‘A Whole New Mind’).**

Martyn Newman calls this new style of leadership, “Emotional Capitalism.” He argues that emotionally-intelligent leaders *“create value and influence through their capacity to identify with the emotional experience and aspirations of their people, and build shared identities with them”* (Newman, 2007).

5. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

In many crises, heads go down and concentrate on the task in hand. However, the first thing to diminish is the level of open communication with staff. Emotionally-intelligent leaders are excellent communicators and can relate well to people at every level. Their employees are fully committed to working *with* the leader rather than *for* him/her.

Former BP boss, Tony Hayward, was severely criticised in his handling over the BP Deepwater Horizon rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the worst offshore oil spill in U.S history, which killed 11 workers and destroyed the lives of local citizens.

Despite his best efforts at communicating with the wider public and with congress, his demeanour lacked passion and empathy with the grieving families who had suffered and

the lives of those whose livelihoods had been threatened. When asked for a comment on the crisis, having recently attended a glitzy yacht race around England's Isle of Wight, he told Louisiana residents that no one wanted to resolve the crisis as much as he did because "I'd like my life back." The rest is history!

Conclusion:

While the traditional cognitive, analytical and technical skills are still vitally important, they are no longer enough in today's challenging environment. EQ is increasingly becoming a critical success factor for today's leader. Balance is the key! With a combination of both IQ and EQ skills, you can become a much more 'rounded' and emotionally-intelligent leader.

If you would like to find out more about Emotional Intelligence or undergo an EQ self-assessment please contact Deirdre and Daire at www.managementbriefs.com for further information.

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