

BEING SMART ONLY TAKES YOU SO FAR

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LEADERS ARE MASTERS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BUT SOMETIMES THEY NEED COACHING.

By Bob Wall

IN HIGH-IQ PROFESSIONS AND COMPANIES, what distinguishes the individuals who rise to the top from those who don't?

Research indicates that IQ and training account for as little as 20 percent of the difference between star performers and ordinary employees. The remaining 80 percent is attributable to emotional intelligence. And when it comes to success in leadership, emotional intelligence is known as the "90 percent factor." Regardless of training and experience, the most successful leaders are those who master the competencies associated with emotional intelligence.

These findings call for a dramatic change in how training professionals prepare leaders to deal with performance management. It is no longer sufficient to train leaders to hold people accountable for what they do. Leaders must also hold employees accountable for how they do their work. Because of the enormous impact emotional intelligence has on career success, leaders must be prepared to provide coaching.

The impact of emotional intelligence on performance makes coaching employees and managers much more complex and challenging. It is one thing to have a discussion about accomplishing a performance objective, but it is quite another to have conversations about interpersonal deficiencies and personal quirks that make an intelligent and trained individual far less effective than he might otherwise be.





Engagement

Leadership development programs should include elements that emphasize emotional intelligence.

The program must engage leaders in the development of their own emotional intelligence. The basic assumption in all coaching is that coaches have a higher level of competence in coaching than the people they mentor. We cannot teach something to others that we ourselves do not possess. To be a credible coach, leaders must embody the very competencies they are developing in others.

In 26 years of executive coaching and leadership development, I've never met anyone who goes to work with the conscious intent to undermine their team's morale and sabotage their own leadership success. Sadly, many leaders do exactly that because they lack insight into themselves and fail to recognize how their behavior affects the very people on whom they rely for their success.

To develop emotional intelligence, you must be willing to take an honest look at yourself and work on areas that need improvement. A variety of instruments are now available to provide measures of emotional capacity. Measurement is a good place to start, but developing emotional intelligence cannot be accomplished in a day or two of training. It is a lifetime journey of self discovery.

Companies can support growth in this area by defining cultural and leadership principles that call for leadership and teamwork marked by emotional intelligence. They can offer courses on the topic and provide reading lists, but none of these efforts will be successful if leaders are allowed to continue to behave in ways that are obviously incongruent with a company's stated values.

Leaders and employees who lack critical emotional competencies must be given developmental objectives that, if not met, result in serious consequences. Otherwise, the organization's efforts to make emotional intelligence a priority in the workplace will result in cynicism and despair among employees.

Interpersonal relationships and feedback

Another element of a successful leadership program includes teaching leaders how to develop close interpersonal relationships with their direct reports. Many leaders choose to hold their direct reports at arm's length. Building relationships takes time and the desire to get to know, and become known, at a personal level. Some argue that personal distance makes it easier to hold people accountable.

Coaching for emotional intelligence requires building relationships that develop personal connectedness between leaders and team members. Coaching for emotional intelligence addresses personal issues and interpersonal behaviors that can be difficult to discuss. Defensiveness can easily derail these conversations. It is much easier to be receptive to this kind of coaching if you know that your manager has taken time to get to know you, cares about you as a person, and genuinely wants to help you achieve success.

Leaders must be thoroughly trained to give effective feedback. Training must focus on developing observational and descriptive skills so managers can address problematic behavioral issues in crystal-clear language that is objective and specific. Global words, such as "rude" or "overly aggressive" provide no useful information and are more likely to produce a defensive reaction during the coaching.

Leaders should also be trained in a very simple, structured method on how to formulate and deliver praise and corrective feedback. Many leaders avoid coaching because it is uncomfortable and because they lack a model that makes organizing and delivering feedback less awkward.

Leaders should increase the amount of praise they offer to staff. The infrequency of praise from leaders has always mystified me. People want nothing more than to do a good job and be recognized for it. Most leaders acknowledge they should give more positive feedback. Yet a recent Gallup Poll revealed that 65 percent of Americans haven't received recognition in the past year. A United States Depart-

ment of Labor study found that the number one reason why people leave organizations is that they don't feel appreciated. The Gallup study found that increasing employee recognition lowers turnover, raises customer loyalty, and increases productivity.

Praise lets people know their managers pay attention to what they do and appreciate their efforts. If people are routinely acknowledged for what they do well, they are much more receptive to corrective coaching.

Frequent, heart-felt praise builds trust and intimacy between leaders and their direct reports. Praise can be formulated and delivered in 10 to 15 seconds. Being too busy to praise is no excuse. After a staff meeting, you might stop by someone's desk and say "Marie, I want to talk to you about your contribution to our staff meeting. I asked a question about how to reduce our budget and for a moment there was dead silence. You spoke up with an idea and that was the opening of a very good discussion. I want to thank you for getting the ball rolling on a very tough subject. Nice work."

Praise takes little effort but garners such huge returns.

Difficult conversations

Leaders must also develop the courage to have difficult conversations. I've often heard employees complain that management fails to intervene when someone is not performing well. This leads them to conclude that their managers don't notice poor performance, or worse yet, that they notice but don't care.

The lack of an effective coaching model is one reason managers avoid corrective feedback. But lack of courage plays a role as well. Developing close personal relationships with people can make corrective coaching for emotional intelligence challenging, but leaders must be trained to manage both the personal and professional relationships as they coach. Personal relationships build closeness, interpersonal comfort, and the knowledge that leaders genuinely care about people as human beings. Providing corrective coaching is one of the responsibilities that defines the

COACHING FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The following coaching structure is easy to memorize and organizes praise or corrective coaching in a sequence that makes managers' coaching sessions more effective and more comfortable.

Once memorized, the sentence stems organize the coaching communication, but the feedback should be put in a manager's own words. The only requirement is that each of the topics must be included in the coaching conversation.

Opening statement

"I want to talk to you about..."
(general topic of conversation)

Observation

"I noticed ..."
(specific descriptions of performance or behaviors)

Impact

"As a result, ..."
(describe the impact of the performance or behaviors on the job)

Expectation

"From now on, I would like you to..."
(describe expected performance or behaviors)

professional relationship between leaders and their teams.

Leaders can demonstrate that they genuinely care about their direct reports on a personal level, but when their performance or behavior has a negative impact on the job, they have no choice but to intervene. If they have developed personal relationships with their staff and have been providing praise frequently, corrective coaching is less likely to be taken as a personal attack. It is, in fact, an expression of

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their personal commitment to their team members' success.

Managers must provide coaching for emotional intelligence to their staff. Executives need to provide it to their managers as well. Executives need to remind managers that to invite an open discussion, they must remain calm and encourage people to help solve the problem. Nothing shuts down discussions faster than an angry manager.

Coaching and performance

Leaders should make conversations about performance the focal point of their performance management system. Managers get so focused on formal appraisals and performance agreements that the art of coaching gets lost. Coaching is nothing more than having

frequent conversations about performance and emotional intelligence.

With adequate, genuine praise and quick responses to the need for improvement, performance appraisals contain no surprises and performance management focuses on the conversations that routinely occur throughout the performance cycle. Training professionals should remind leaders that if they aren't coaching on a routine basis, they are failing as leaders and their team's performance will show it.

In the end, you get what you talk about. **T+D**

Bob Wall specializes in leadership, team, and cultural development.

This article is based on his book, *Coaching for Emotional Intelligence*; www.bobwallonline.com.