

Is Emotional Intelligence the number one leadership trait?

Dr Mark Kilgallon weighs in on why he believes authentic, emotionally connected leaders are at the forefront of their professions.

How to be an effective leader is often discussed from a very well-worn perspective, however, if we really sit down to think about what leadership actually is, we may in fact determine that the stereotyped version of it is in fact inaccurate. Or rather, outdated.

Leadership is not just about barking orders and making decisions, you do not suddenly get promoted and know exactly what to do! There is a more nuanced and refined way to think about it, and then by default how to be good at it, or rather how to be an effective leader changes as the definition does.

Maddyness spoke to Dr Mark Kilgallon from [Policing Matters](#). Mark has a great deal of knowledge from his own leadership time in the police force, to becoming an executive coach. He regularly works 1:1 with CEO's and their teams to create an effective and robust leadership in which his clients know themselves, gain confidence, learn to listen and empower their team effectively, whilst also retaining the aspect of accountability and verification.

COVID-19 has changed the nature of work, where working from home has become the norm, and also proved that companies if they trust their employees can produce incredible results from the comfort of their own home.

[Maddyness] Do you think there is a new understanding of the word 'leadership' and what do you understand from it?

[Mark] There is a constant struggle within organisations to define what good leadership should be. It ranges from a very transactional, rationally based and short-term approach, to a transformational 'people centred' emotional understanding.

Through my experience working with highly successful leaders, they are successful because they both understand the needs of the business (the figures) and how to deliver them; but they are also conscious that in order to create a long-term sustainable culture that continues to produce results, there needs to be a values-based connection between leaders and their colleagues.

Leadership is a person-to-person relationship and people want to emotionally connect with their leader in order to feel trust, value and worth. This authentic connectivity also encourages risk-taking, where people nurture the strength to expose their own vulnerabilities in order to be part of a learning organisation that creates value for customers and communities.

It is not by chance, that throughout this COVID-19 crisis, emotionally intelligent leaders have operated from the top echelons of performance. When you build trust within an organisation's operational framework, leaders can set the vision, values and purpose, whilst team-mates can develop a positive working culture that delivers real outcomes.

Leadership is a position of privilege that many people are asked to adopt during their careers.

Some leaders are 'formal' in the sense that they are organisationally appointed to a position; others are 'informal' leaders who have been encouraged to adopt the role of influencer in how the business is achieved.

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Talk me through the points I need to cover about self- discovery, before I start leading a team. Why is looking inwards the best way to start in becoming a good leader?

If you want people to follow your direction, then you will have to ensure that you are operating at your own optimum level. If you haven't explored your own strengths, beliefs, abilities, behaviours and values, (all of which impact on your performance as a leader), what right do you have to ask other people to come with you on your journey?

The best leaders understand what they are good at and can articulate why.

They understand where their weaknesses lie and can make the necessary adjustments to compensate. They understand the impact of their emotions and the part it plays in every critical decision they make. Leaders have a belief in their values, one that illustrates they can not only identify them, but also express what they mean to them; it is important to note that these are two different skills.

In recognising, for example, the impact that a poor work/life balance has on their decision-making ability, they can identify what motivates them and understand what drains them of vitality.

Leaders, or rather good leaders know all of these things because they have taken the time to authentically understand and analyse their own performance. Albeit, often with the help of a coach or trusted colleague. These leaders are brilliant at 'reflection in action' which is where something happens- they analyse their performance for value – then they adapt their performance and

act upon the learning. There is a clear pathway that they constantly follow. This includes intense feedback loops, where they frequently receive what Tom Peters calls the 'unvarnished truth'.

In fully understanding themselves, they then have earned the right to ask others to follow. There is NO shortcut.

What are your top three key leadership qualities that we should all be looking to embody?

I think everyone will have their own take on this question and this will be borne out through their experiences. The thing I would say is that leaders need to have three things.

1. They need to be cognitively bright in order to manage the complexity.
2. They should have a strong emotional intelligence in order to manage the passions within the organisation
3. Their behaviours need to match their values.

If I was answering this through some form of competency framework then I would say that I have spotted three things in high performing leaders:

Resilience: the ability to take a knockback and then return and start again. Resilience is not just about what you can do, it's about doing, recovering, and then doing again. Most leaders I know have had a setback in their careers and have found the strength to return.

Respecting diversity and difference: Great leaders know their limitations and as such they seek to have people around them who are different. Initially, this can be incredibly frustrating, especially when people think differently to you, but long term a diversity of attitude and approach creates worth that can be valued by a far broader audience. If everyone thinks like the leader, then why does the leader need them? Diversity is a key.

Demonstrating your own vulnerability allows others to have the strength

and courage to admit their own. In doing this, it allows the team to move forward in a more connected manner, where the relationship is based on mutual respect and understanding of the others' capacity.

*In being the leader, you are at your most vulnerable
– stop denying this fact!*

Emotional intelligence seems to be a key point in leadership development. If we understand that having a stronger emotional bond with our team allows us as leaders to both trust and empower our team, why does this work so well?

Often people want to belong to something that is greater than themselves. It is this sense of belonging that creates the emotional buy-in. It is not by chance that the 'All Blacks' rugby team are successful; every player is conscious that the team is far greater than the individual. They are connecting with a legacy that has prevailed over time.

Likewise, with other organisations that have created a 'worth' or value system within which an individual can flourish. If I know you care, then I am likely to reciprocate those feelings and work with a purpose; if you are a tyrant, I am likely to try and disconnect from your actions at the first opportunity.

It still amazes me that some leaders shout in the workplace, this just creates a disengagement from organisational purpose at the deepest of levels. If an individual feels threatened in the workplace, their amygdala kicks in (their fight or flight warning system) and all they want to do is survive.

A well thought through positive emotional environment encourages them to connect at a more purposeful level. It goes without saying therefore that organisations need to be really careful who they promote and what support they give these leaders once they have attained the position.

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How to receive feedback as a leader, even if you don't want to hear it

Being an active listener is key to knowing and creating rapport with individuals, on your team or as clients. But let's clarify that is not about being 'soft' in the traditional sense of the word, it is still about accountability.

None of what we have spoken about is about 'so-called' soft skills. Emotionally intelligent leaders form a valued heart at the core of their organisation. Helping people emotionally connect to the values of an organisation is not soft.

Delivering an ethical framework within which people can behave is not overindulgent

Creating and then empowering risk taking teams is not easy Acknowledging and sustaining the full value of diversity and difference is not a luxury

Assisting people to develop their skills in having difficult conversations is not without its own fractious outcome

Debriefing critical incidents and then capturing the learning is gruelling

Establishing a single focus on the vision for the future of the organisation is deeply intricate.

This is about being performance focused and delivering positive outcomes. It is vital that we don't get into a debate about hard/soft skills – it's too binary in approach and far too simplistic.

Leaders need to care for their people and if part of that care is compassionately telling people that they are not performing to their full capacity, then so be it. This then becomes about 'how' you tell people they are

not performing, not ignoring underperformance because it is too difficult. Too many organisations will put off a 15-minute conversation for 15 months rather than address the issues at hand. That approach is not within the understanding of an emotionally intelligent leader.

Why work with a coach 1:1 as a leader and the benefits that this can have. How have you helped individuals blossom into being good leaders, mentors etc.

It has become the norm for high performing individuals to seek out the assistance of a coach. Indeed, coaching and mentoring are frequently embedded into organisational frameworks. Coaching is a relationship with another professional so leaders need to make sure that they can authentically connect with the individual, that they can trust their confidentiality, and that they give the coach permission to discuss areas of discomfort within their performance. If any aspect of this equation is missing, then the relationship will not thrive.

As a coach I genuinely want to help people with their performance. This requires focus and energy and extensive listening. But at its core is authenticity. A leader who authentically wants to explore their performance as outlined above will find in coaching a trustworthy environment where they can feel challenged and supported. If the leader comes with the right attitude then they can flourish; if they attend a session unwilling to be vulnerable, then they are wasting their time.

And sometimes people come to coaching for a good cathartic release. And who doesn't benefit from that?