



Teamwork really does make the dream work. That's why so many businesses are investing heavily in results-based team-building, focused on emotional intelligence. Businesses understand that each member is vital to the productivity and value of their team, and working to foster an effective team relationship means better communication, fewer errors, and optimal business results. Today, emotional intelligence is at the forefront of a strong leader's mind. Strong leaders nurture an efficient and innovative workplace by paying attention to their emotions and those of their employees. Furthermore, according to an article written by Forbes contributor Rajeev Peshawaria, people with higher emotional intelligence make more money and get promoted faster.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines emotional intelligence as one's ability to understand the way people feel and react, the ability to use this skill to make good judgments, and to avoid and solve problems. Put another way: emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and control your own feelings, and to understand the feelings of others and react to them in a suitable way. Almost everyone associates with others during their professional life, so it makes sense that those with the ability to assess and understand the emotions of others can more effectively disseminate information, diagnose and solve problems, and communicate with a tense team to meet a difficult deadline.

This begs the question – what can we do to strengthen our leadership skills by improving our emotional intelligence? Below are some quick tips and tricks for you to try.

### Listen and Ask Questions.

Harvard University Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Lab found that people spend 60% of their time during conversations talking about themselves. And when we aren't talking about ourselves, we're thinking of what we should say next. Well over half of the time during our conversations, even when the focus of those conversations is another person, we are talking or thinking about ourselves.

Try making it a point during your next conversation to consciously listen to what the other person is saying. After they finish speaking, pause for a mo-

ment and then craft your response. It may also help to try paraphrasing what you heard them say, to see if they agree. That way, you can confirm if you were really listening and you understand what that person was conveying to you.

### Try a "Power Thank You."

According to Harvard Business Review's article by Mark Goulston, this is an effective way to acknowledge and communicate gratitude to your employees and co-workers. It will make your employees feel validated and encourage their continued dedication to your organization. Here's how:

1. Thank the person for something specific they did.
2. Acknowledge the effort or sacrifice they made in doing this.
3. Explain what it personally meant to you.

Example: "Thank you, Sarah, for working long hours when we were short-staffed. I realize you spent less time with your family that week, but you did it with no complaints. You motivated the team to get everything completed timely. As a result, it has taken a weight off my shoulders. Thank you for everything you did, I truly appreciate it."

This response obviously sounds canned and awkward at first, but after you utilize the "power thank you" a few times, it will become more natural and effective. It may help to outline the three parts of your power thank you prior to delivering it in person, but this approach works great as a written note as well.

### Be Honest.

One of the best signs of an emotionally intelligent leader is his or her ability to communicate honestly with their employees and co-workers. Forbes contributor wrote: "Emotional integrity is the courage to acknowledge one's true feelings, wants and desires without judging them with the societal lens. In essence, it is about being 100% honest with oneself. If one is just emotionally intelligent without being emotionally honest, the benefit will at best be temporary and skin deep."

When working on your emotional intelligence with others, it is important to be honest about how you are feeling as well. Listening to your emotions can provide you with more information than you think. It could raise a red flag about an employee you hadn't noticed before, or allow you to knock down a barrier that previously existed with a co-worker. Listening to your gut and having the courage to speak up about what it is saying, even if it is in contradiction with others, is important for personal and company growth.

However, a good leader also knows how to be honest in an appropriate and respectful way. It is easy to let stress take over, but it can lead to comments and conversations you may regret. Try taking a few deep breaths when you encounter a stressful situation, and wait to react until you can feel your pulse slow down. Taking the time and energy to allow yourself to be honest with yourself may allow you to recognize more about your team earlier. Once you have mastered how to listen and express your opinions in a respectful manner, it is important you do so consistently. Bottling up opinions and feelings will likely cause an unprofessional outburst down the road.

### Have the Hard Conversations.

This might be every leader's least favorite thing to do. Hard conversations are as uncomfortable as they are necessary. They force improvement from employees, and keep everyone on track for what is best for your organization.

Try reframing these conversations into opportunities for your employee to learn from previous shortcomings and improve their skills. Ignoring the situation means the problem will only get worse, but ignoring the conversation is exactly the same.

The most common way to prepare for a difficult

conversation is to look for proof of errors and mistakes. But before barging proof-in-hand into the employee's office with accusations of poor performance, consider these 5 steps, from a JCA Global blog written by Bill Davies:

4. Get into the right mindset before the conversation. This is not an interrogation, this is a conversation. The purpose of the conversation is to resolve a conflict.
5. Engage with rapport. Consider the timing and location of the meeting – think neutral territory. Listen to your employee, and ask questions rather than making pointed statements.
6. Create a shared understanding. Make an effort to understand the employee's needs, wants, and perspective, and explain your position so the employee can, in turn, understand the expectation.
7. Finish with an agreement. Try to reach an agreed "yes" without abruptly ending the conversation. Clarify and end on a positive note.
8. Follow up the meeting with a confirmation of the agreement. After the conversation is over, follow up with an e-mail summarizing what occurred.

Still unsure how to harness the power of your own emotional intelligence?

That is understandable. Society is generally conditioned to keep emotions out of the workplace. But emotions don't care about the walls surrounding our offices, and the workplace can be a very stressful environment, even for a great team! Emotional intelligence is an important tool for helping make the most out of your team's workday because it focuses on **respect** and **trust**. Employees who feel respected and trusted will be more productive, more willing to go above and beyond when needed, and more likely to volunteer ideas to make your workplace better. A cohesive workplace has the added benefit of making work more enjoyable for you and your co-workers.

Having trouble with one of your employees? Try showing them respect by acknowledging the challenge they may be facing, and listen to their issues or concerns, gaining their trust. Seeing high rates of turnover? Check in with your employees and yourself, to see if you are treating your work product and co-workers with respect. You have nothing to lose, but so much to gain. 📌