

Can too high Emotional Intelligence make a weak leader?

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Since Daniel Goleman published his book "Emotional Intelligence" in 1995, the idea that Emotional Intelligence matters in leadership has kept gaining ground. Emotional Intelligence has been progressively integrated in many leadership programs worldwide.

Some books like **Linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work** have shown that Emotional Intelligence is a very important factor in business performance.

But can too high Emotional Intelligence have a negative impact? In particular, can it make a leader weak? What is first of all a "weak leader"?

One definition could be a leader who is not enforcing enough with his people and doesn't make things happen. His people and his peers tend to take advantage of him.

That doesn't sound like an effective leader! Can too much Emotional Intelligence contribute to that?

Because I am the expert for Emotional Intelligence in leadership at Progress-U, you may expect me to promote this concept in any circumstance and to answer no.

But actually, my reply is: "Yes, it can happen". If high Emotional Intelligence is not balanced with other qualities.

Although not as common as the problem of having low Emotional Intelligence, the problem of having too high Emotional Intelligence is also possible.

What can happen when a leader has too high Emotional Intelligence?

One of the key dimensions of Emotional Intelligence is the ability to be aware of and to understand the emotions of other people. This dimension is called Social Awareness in Daniel Goleman's model. Other authors sum up it as "Empathy".

High empathy can be a major resource for a leader. Think of Churchill during the battle of London.

But there are two ways high empathy can also create a weak leader.

1/ First, when it comes to making things happen and confronting unmet expectations, high empathy can lead to permissiveness.

Let's take a very simple example. A leader has to confront a team member who has repeatedly failed to fulfill a commitment. If this leader has high empathy, he will try hard to understand what is behind this behavior, especially the emotional side. Has this team member personal difficulties? How is he feeling?

Where is the risk of being permissive here? If the leader stops at understanding finds such good excuses for his team member that he forgets about enforcing what was agreed previously, then he has become permissive.

Emotional Intelligence needs to be combined with the ability to enforce effectively.

It is a delicate balance to achieve. Actually, leaders with high Emotional Intelligence need to be careful on this point. They need to make conscious efforts to develop their ability to enforce effectively if it is too low.

How can we do that? It starts with catching ourselves whenever we become permissive and reflecting on how we could have been more enforcing in that particular case.

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When Emotional Intelligence is balanced with the ability to enforce, it becomes a very powerful combination.

2/ Secondly, leaders with high empathy tend to pay a lot of attention to the needs of their team members and colleagues. For instance, they are often good at standing up for their team and going the extra mile to help them. In this way, they are considered helpful.

Nothing is wrong with that. Problems arise when we tend to neglect our own needs. That is to pay more attention to other people's needs than to our own needs. **There is a risk to be in a self-sacrificing mode.**

What can be our own needs? Find some time to resource ourselves, for example. Or getting our own work done without working 14 hours a day. Or making sure that our contribution to the company is perceived by the top management.

Therefore, Emotional Intelligence must be combined with the ability to attend to our own needs while being sensitive to other people's needs.

This may require making more frequent use of a very precious word in the English language: "No". "No" to other people's needs when the price to pay is neglecting our own needs.

Actually, in one way, the ability to attend our own needs is part of another dimension of Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness.

As a matter of fact, whenever we are in a self-sacrificing mode, there are good chances that an emotion comes along: frustration. "I do so much for them, and they don't even notice/ thank me/ show gratefulness".

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Whenever we have this sort of internal dialogue, it is an invitation to look at ourselves: are we paying enough attention to our own needs?

As a conclusion, being permissive and being self-sacrificing are two risks that leaders with high Emotional Intelligence can encounter.

Still, the benefits of developing Emotional Intelligence far outweigh these risks.

We only need to take these risks into account in the process of developing our Emotional Intelligence.



Sebastien Henry is **Progress-U's expert for Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and stress management**. He works with executives who want to:

- avoid feeling exhausted and uprooted as their career takes them to the top;
- become more inspiring leaders by developing their Emotional Intelligence (EQ) at work; and, as a consequence
- be able to motivate their people more and retain the best.

Having worked in an Asia-Pacific regional position at a multinational company, Sebastien has experimented extensively on how to develop Emotional Intelligence in his daily work life. He is currently writing a book on this topic. His articles on Emotional Intelligence in Leadership have been published in Human Resources and South China Morning Post.

He firmly believes in action, and the tools he uses and shares are derived from several areas of his life: his business experience as a corporate executive, of course, but also his intensive practice of mountaineering and rock climbing (7a on-sight and more than 50 alpine routes), his commitment to teach and coach prisoners, and his daily meditations for more than six years.

Positions of his clients as a one-to-one coach are: Asia/Pacific General Manager, Country General Manager, Department Head, etc.

Languages: Spoken and written Mandarin, Japanese, English, French (native language)

Credentials:

- MBA, BA in Psychology, BA in Philosophy
- Certified NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner
- Certified NLP Trainer (NLP, USA)
- Certified Coach (ICC)
- More than 40 days of training with the Gestalt approach at the Paris School of Gestalt
- Certified Trainer of the "EQ Impact Learning" program (Talentsmart, USA)

Services offered: 1:1 Executive Coaching, Group Seminars and Workshops, Key Note Speeches

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