

LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS FROM...THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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Dear Reader,

Last month, I published an article in "Human Resources" on how one's having too much Emotional Intelligence can sometimes make him a weak leader. This happens when Emotional Intelligence is not balanced enough with the ability to be enforcing.

Somehow, I felt that I needed to counterbalance this view with **examples of leaders with high emotional intelligence who managed to be strong and inspiring leaders.**

Then I remembered a character I started to appreciate when I first read his memoirs more than 10 years ago. Although he lived about 1900 years ago, reading his memoirs is still a fascinating experience.

His name is Marcus Aurelius, and his job as top-executive was...as a Roman Emperor. His memoirs, called "Meditations" are worth reading again and again. More insights come from, "Marcus Aurelius: A biography" by Anthony Birley.

This article will be about what we can learn from Marcus Aurelius about leadership. After all, according to historians, he seemed to have been one of the most popular emperors, staying in power for far longer than the most emperors back then.

One interesting habit of Marcus Aurelius is paying a lot of attention to his mentors.

All through his life, he kept a very close relationship with a few mentors with whom he would regularly share views, take a few steps back from his daily responsibilities, and strive to find some emotional balance.

At that time, these mentors were guided by philosophy. Today, philosophy is almost alien to the board room and is usually practiced as a scholarly or academic exercise. But at that time, philosophy had much more influence on senior leaders of the Roman Empire.

Marcus Aurelius in particular was close to the Stoics, a school of thought that set as a goal to promote, if we write it in modern terms, emotional balance and peace of mind no matter the circumstances. In fact, thanks to his memoirs, he is often considered as a major author of the stoic school.

It is worth noting that the kind of relationship he had with his mentors is actually quite close to what executive coaching offers today.

Another notable habit of Marcus Aurelius is giving high importance to his development as a person and as a leader.

This is something that can be seen very clearly from his memoirs.

At that time, the Roman Empire was not in good shape and was threatened by invasions on several fronts (some equivalent of the cut-throat competition today, except that at that time it was really about cutting throats!).

What is admirable is that even in such trying times, for Marcus Aurelius, managing his personal state of mind and developing his wisdom were as important – if not more important - as making decisions and leading the empire.

Some of the most moving pages of his memoirs show him on the road to visit and support his troops. At that time, such business trips could last for six months, one year, or much more. Even in the midst of these tense situations, even while the Roman Empire was at war, he would keep some significant time for self-reflection.

In this self-reflection, one question kept surfacing repeatedly. In modern terms, the question was, **“How can I grow more centered, more emotionally balanced, and more peaceful today?”**

I would say that the importance he gave to his personal development is one of the reasons for his successful leadership remembered as one of the most inspiring in the Roman empire and why he continues to be a source of inspiration for executives today.

In leadership thought today, this attention to developing our personality as a leader is often called “self-leadership.”

To sum it up, we can learn from Marcus Aurelius the key point: **Who we are as a leader is as important as what we do, and that constantly developing further our personality is the foundation of inspiring leadership.**

Marcus Aurelius is definitely still inspiring, 1900 years later!

Warmly

Sebastien



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 (NLPU, 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