

# Coaching, emotional intelligence and leadership

*Deb Barnard* on how we can make the most of our emotional intelligence

For much of our education, we learn to equate how academically clever we are with our future potential. We are legally obliged to journey up the ladder of scholarly learning – a world full of hard facts, rules, principles, theories and conceptual application – and we are mercilessly examined and tested every step of the way. The majority of our testing is based on our cognitive abilities and many – starting with Charles Darwin and other non-Western thinkers before him – have argued that this is just a small part of the bigger picture as to what influences ‘life success’.

Darwin noticed that emotional expression was an important component of survival and adaptation.<sup>1</sup> By the 1980s Howard Gardner had introduced the notion of multiple intelligences: our interpersonal and intrapersonal skill, our ability to relate well, both to our self and others.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until the mid 1990s that Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, brought the concepts of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Emotional Quotient (EQ) to popular attention.

What followed was a raft of research looking at successful leadership in relation to social, emotional and relational competencies – many

came to the conclusion that EQ was a distinguishing factor in ‘superior leadership performance’. Leaders with higher EQ often outperformed those with a higher IQ. In fact, many of the more successful leaders often had a lower IQ than their team members.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, during my work on leadership development and coaching, I have noticed for myself how we tend to lean towards those who demonstrate strengths in EQ. This has been shown time and time again as the result of a role modelling exercise where the group is asked, individually, to prepare a ‘skills and qualities’ profile of a leader who has been significant to them. It's important to note that the term ‘leader’ includes those who exercise leadership and is not limited to the person at the top. Commonalities are then recorded on a flip chart and presented as the leadership blueprint.

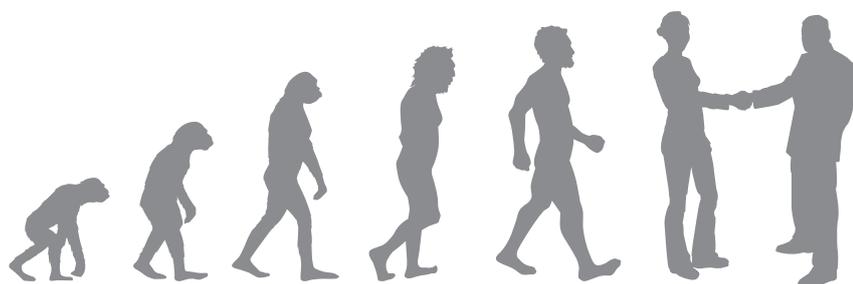
It is striking to note the similarities and consistencies between the preferred models of leadership. Invariably, the blueprints illustrate a range of characteristics associated with EQ, usually with a distinct absence of the characteristics associated with IQ. In the main, the blueprints reflect the four Goleman areas of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.<sup>4</sup>

Strange then that our job descriptions rarely mention the qualities we admire and respond positively to – for example, passion, trustworthiness, other-centredness, humility, commitment, fairness.

We are not a sector built on formal qualifications – most of those exercising leadership in the arts are usually there through their experience and a strong emotional attachment and engagement to what they do. It doesn't seem surprising that the arts should instinctively value EQ qualities; what is surprising is that the same blueprint also materialises in the business sector.

I suspect that the arts are EQ-rich – and yet, do we truly value, appreciate and understand such acumen? We have many natural leaders in the arts, including artists, workshop leaders, project coordinators and CEOs. How can we make the most of what we have already and extend those abilities? Coaching is one intervention, both as a mindset and skill set, which can provide a useful vehicle for EQ development.

Working with a coach on a formal one-to-one basis has the potential to extend our self-awareness, and to improve relationships with others as well as providing a safe place to explore solutions and direction – a forum to simply think, reflect and decide. A coach is not a mentor and doesn't need to be working in the same area or field as the coachee. The aim is to facilitate self-directed learning rather than offering advice. Additionally, we could choose to develop a coaching style of leadership and extend this into developing coaching cultures within our organisations.



1. **Bar-On, R. and Parker, J.D.A.** (2000). *Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment and Application at Home, School and in the Workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

2. **Gardner, H.** (1983). *Frames of Mind*. New York: Basic Books.

3. **Goleman, D.** (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

4. **Goleman, D.** (1996). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury.

5. **Sparrow, S.** (2008). 'Coaching Cultures'. Available online at: [www.personneltoday.com/articles/2008/03/18/44838/coaching-cultures-culture-vultures-dont-wing-it.html](http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2008/03/18/44838/coaching-cultures-culture-vultures-dont-wing-it.html)

Developing a coaching culture within management is becoming increasingly popular. The aim is to move sideways from the more traditional models of leadership – one person responsible for the many – to a culture of shared and distributed responsibility, where the leader doesn't have to hold all the answers.

A coaching style of leadership takes an approach which resists telling, giving advice or providing the answers – it is about learning not to lead in the traditional sense, but instead facilitate others to come up with their own solutions. It is about asking questions rather than giving answers – and provoking meaningful, investigative learning and problem-solving processes, thereby strengthening the many rather than relying on the few. Peter Hawkins (business coach and author) neatly describes a coaching culture as one which has moved from 'problems come up and solutions come down', to a flatter structure where 'challenges come down and solutions come up'.<sup>5</sup>

A coaching approach is not exclusive – it is understood that there will be many leadership occasions when it is appropriate and necessary to be directive, give advice and offer suggestions. However, the development of coaching cultures gives us the opportunity to re-embrace creative ways of working; to develop shared leadership; and to enjoy meaningful relationships which operate within a climate of high trust and shared responsibility.

A simple coaching technique which often translates well to management skills is active listening. Active listening contradicts how we conduct most

day-to-day conversations, which usually operate on three levels:

**1. ME NOW:** We wait until there is a pause in the conversation, so we can make our point, or we interrupt. During a 'me now' conversation, we are concentrating on when to speak, so not really listening at all. Quite often, we may interrupt with 'I hear what you're saying, but ...' This usually has the effect of negating that which we have just heard. A more useful approach is to simply start with 'Can I add to that?'

**2. JUST LIKE ME:** We listen to someone's story and dilemma and respond with a similar story or experience of our own, often believing this to be an empathetic response. In reality, we have taken the focus of attention back to ourselves.

**3. DO IT LIKE ME:** We respond to a problem by offering a solution or advice. This is not always what is needed, and we rarely ask the other person if they actually want some advice or just wish to be heard out or need a sounding board. To offer a solution too quickly can also undermine and engender a sense of inadequacy.

The first stage of active listening is simply encouraging the other person to talk more. How often are we ever invited to keep talking to expand our thinking? This is followed by simply reflecting back what we have heard, which demonstrates our listening and understanding, and enables the other person to hear their words and re-appraise their content. Achieving active listening isn't difficult; what is difficult is learning to shift our conversational habits of a lifetime.

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