

It is easy to react before thinking, but a good manager has the tools to keep his feelings in check



# Becoming a leader who is emotionally intelligent

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any senior executives will assure you that to seal the deal, you must have a strong personal relationship with the person you are

doing business with. They emphasise the importance of the handshake, face-to-face communication, and knowing what makes the other person tick. For people in sales, business development or in deal-making roles, this can mean spending much time away from the home base, chasing up new contracts or maintaining old ones.

Fortunately today's technology allows them to stay in touch with what's happening back in the office. The great thing is that with a laptop, PDA, the internet and e-mail, everyone can be connected all the time.

Or is that really so great?

There is a downside to being able to send and receive all those e-mails so easily, and businesspeople who travel regularly soon realise that.

Just imagine, you've been on the road for two weeks. The trip has been tiring and stressful, and you're back in a hotel room late at night catching up on your e-mail. In the inbox, there is a string of messages, on which you are a copy addressee, about the proposed date for the annual dinner three months hence. There are several more

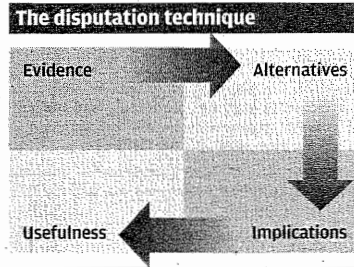
## He who conquers himself is the mightiest warrior

Confucius (551-479 BC)  
Chinese philosopher

sent between people who sit within 10 metres of each other about "tomorrow's sales meeting" which, of course, you won't be attending.

After unwisely clicking on a message entitled "photocopier repaired", you suddenly see red. Without thinking, you fire off a reply, launching a tirade against the office administration manager and the world in general. For added impact, you copy it to a few directors.

The next morning when you log on,



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SOURCE: GENOS

you have your replies. They include a self-justification from the admin manager, a word of caution from your direct boss, and a terse note from a director about wasting time.

Nowadays, this sort of thing happens too often. The ease of communicating by e-mail means people act before thinking. Provoked by some relatively minor matter, they allow their emotions to rule. And only after pounding out a message and hitting send, do they sit back and reflect.

To avoid this trap, it is important to have emotional self-control. That makes it possible to pause, ignore irritations, sidestep confrontations and remain focused on the job in hand. Inside, there may be feelings of anger or frustration, but these emotions will not divert you from working in a professional and productive manner.

Some people are naturally less impulsive or have a longer fuse, and these are useful attributes for any business leader. However, it takes time to learn about taking a step back and not reacting to every little thing.

To develop this skill, it is useful to know the disputation technique. This helps in situations where self-control is needed, and leads to stronger relationships and better outcomes. In most cases, the important first step is simply to remember to use the technique.

The essential thing is to distract yourself, so that negative emotions do not intrude. The easiest way is to take a few deep breaths or a short walk – anything

that "removes" you from the immediate situation. Then, you need to develop a different perspective, which involves finding the following points.

Evidence or facts which can justify your present feelings or state of mind. In examining the assumed cause of your negative emotions, you may realise that you have jumped to conclusions and simply haven't seen the full picture. At this stage, some people choose to list the reasons for their feelings; others prefer just to re-run things in their head to see where it all started. The key is to find what works for you.

Alternatives always exist and must be considered. When upset, most people naturally take a personal view of things. For example, they may perceive slights or insults where none were intended, or wrongly suspect that they are being kept "out of the loop".

This can lead to being unnecessarily negative, rather than maintaining an open attitude and broad outlook. To explore alternatives, put yourself in the other person's shoes for a minute, or ask yourself a series of "what if" questions.

If necessary, scribble down some key points and consider how one led to the next, and what else could have happened. This should also give you a range of options for what to do next.

Implications come into play when the facts of the case seem to support you. But even if you are sure your initial feelings about the situation were fully justified, stop and think about how to react.

In the workplace, it is not always a good idea to press home an advantage or demand an apology, even when you are in the right. Doing that may just create stored-up resentment, which will come back to bite you at some future date.

Usefulness is based on the belief that having a generally negative attitude is far more harmful than the adverse impact of any single incident.

Thus, if someone has a deep-seated fear of failure, this can lead to indecisiveness or procrastination – and the direct result of this could be getting fired. Therefore, when the same problems keep occurring, it pays to think long and hard about the root causes. If your feelings are not "useful", it may be necessary to take positive action which leads to genuine change.

The disputation technique can also be a great tool to help a team confront difficult issues or overcome negative events. It allows people to talk about and analyse their emotions which in normal circumstances is not always easy to do.

## Tips To Win

### Power Question

An invaluable tool for the emotionally intelligent leader is the power question. It helps refocus other people so that they start thinking about solutions rather than problems. Here's how it works. Imagine your team is struggling to build market share and generally feels there is a lack of head office support. To inspire a change, you could ask power questions to examine which specific area is causing most problems, why the head office is not helping and what the team can do directly in the next three days to make some progress. By showing you are ready to accept the challenge and tackle things head on you will find other people are willing to adopt a similarly positive outlook.

### How They Feel

In times of change a leader needs a high degree of emotional self-control. Before acting on any emotions during a corporate takeover,

office relocation or reshuffling of the management team, it is important to think carefully about the feelings of the people involved. Research conducted by Roger D'Aprix, a well-known thinker in the field of communications, suggests that 15 per cent will be angry and strongly resistant to change. About 40 per cent will be fearful, sceptical or distrustful. They will question the organisation's capacity to implement the programme of change properly. About 30 per cent will be uncertain but open. They will be receptive to new possibilities but, being uncertain about the implications, will probably adopt a wait-and-see attitude. The remainder will be hopeful and energised, welcome the change and want to get moving without undue delay. A leader should realise that it is human nature to resist or be wary of change. These feelings cannot be ignored, but must be dealt with so that people see new opportunities rather than new problems.

### Now, Be, How

If a leader understands where the team is now, where it should be in three years' time and how to get there, all the key goals can be achieved. "Now" entails knowing about attitude, abilities, skills, processes, potential and emotional intelligence. "Be" means being clear about how each of these areas can be improved. And "How" requires having a definite plan for moving from "now" to "be". This should relate to individuals and the team as a whole.



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