

What makes a leader

By Daniel Goleman, Harvard Business Review, June 1996

The most effective leaders have a high degree of emotional intelligence (EI). IQ and technical skills are entry-level requirements for leadership positions. But, the hallmark of a great leader is EI.

EI has five components: *self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy* and *social skill*.

Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, drives, values and goals – and how they affect others. People with this quality believe in themselves, are extremely modest, look for constructive criticism from others and always assess themselves honestly.

Self-regulation means exercising restraint on destructive emotions and impulsive behaviour. People who can control their emotions establish trustworthiness and integrity. They can deal with ambiguity effectively and show openness to change.

Motivation refers to a passion to work, for reasons that transcend money or status. It refers to an enthusiastic and persistent drive to pursue goals. Such people show high organizational commitment, are optimistic even if they face challenges and are ever-ready to improve.

Empathy means understanding the feelings of others, and treating them accordingly. Empathetic people can develop others and are sensitive to cross-cultural differences.

Social skill includes building networks and finding common ground. Persuasiveness, effectiveness in leading change, and the ability to build and lead teams, are some of the hallmarks of a person who excels in this area.

Can emotional intelligence be learned?

While genetics certainly has a role to play in EI, research also suggests that EI can be nurtured. Indeed, EI develops with age and maturity and can also be enhanced through training.

There are two important systems in our brain – the limbic system and the neocortical system. The limbic system governs EI. The neocortex, on the other hand, deals with analytical and technical skills. Most training programs are

aimed at neocortical development. So, far from improving EI, they may end up having a negative impact on people's performance.

To enhance the EI of employees, organizations must redesign their training programs to target the limbic system. Building emotional intelligence also requires enthusiasm, dedication and sincere effort on the part of individual employees.

Concluding notes

EI plays as important a role as IQ and technical skills, in making a leader. Fortunately, EI can be learned. Though the process is time-taking and requires great commitment, the efforts will definitely pay off for the individual as well as for the organization.