

BOOK REVIEW

PRIMAL LEADERSHIP: REALIZING THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

By Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee
Boston: The Harvard Business Review Press (2002)
352 pages
Reviewed by Stan Patterson

Daniel Goleman's 1995 best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence* (2006), gave life to a conversation that challenges the long-held idea that emotions are best kept out of the workplace. Intelligence (IQ) that supports attitudes of cold analysis and production above people's feelings has long held sway in the modern leadership environment. His work challenges the primacy of IQ by raising awareness of the value of emotional intelligence as an essential ingredient in effective leadership and in the success of our organizations. Managing relationships, therefore, plays a vital role in sustaining the human platform that supports productivity and profit. "When people feel good, they work at their best" (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 14).

Goleman partners with Richard Boyatzis (Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western University) and Annie McKee (University of Pennsylvania) to address the application of emotional intelligence principles to the behavior of leaders in our institutions and organizations. They coin the phrase "primal leadership" to identify the foundational principle of this application—"that the fundamental task of leaders . . . is to prime good feelings in those they lead. . . . At its root, then, the primal job of leadership is emotional" (p. ix). Passion and enthusiasm, long held to be essential elements in the leadership process, are products of attuned emotions emanating from people at every level of the organization (p. xiii) and not just a necessary element for those at the top levels of an organization. Primal leadership applies holistically to the organization as a body and reflects the emotional maturity and balance of the organization as a whole rather than that of the individual in isolation from the community.

The authors' intentional use of "attunement" as opposed to the more traditional organizational concept of alignment emphasizes the non-linear nature of applied emotional intelligence. Whereas alignment seeks clarity of common purpose, goals, and objectives as a means of keeping a team or organization focused, attunement aims at maintaining the quality of relational health among those who comprise the team or group.

Goleman et al. treat leadership as a function of the group as opposed to that of the individual. The skills of the individual leader contribute to the process of leadership, which is done primarily

via the emotions (p. 3). The “emotional task of the leader is primal” (p. 5) and positions the leader as the emotional guide for the group and establishes the emotional climate of the group. The group “spirit” is thus led to a state of resonance that brings out the very best of each member of the group. In this state of resonance the leadership contribution of each member becomes a force in the overall effectiveness of the organization. The authors assert that a state of dissonance (pp. 6, 19) results when people are driven by negative emotions emanating from command and control behaviors that leverage fear, embarrassment, or other coercive measures as a means of motivating people.

Emotional intelligence is presented as a dynamic condition in a leader or organization and may be learned by addressing associated emotional competencies. These competencies are listed under four categories associated with two general domains (p. 39):

1. *Personal Competence*

- a. Self-awareness is supported by the ability to read one’s emotions and recognize their impact. It involves accurate self-assessment that allows cognizance of one’s strengths and limits, as well as self-confidence.
- b. Self-management draws from competencies of emotional self-control, transparency, adapt ability, achievement, initiative, and optimism.

2. *Social Competence*

- a. Social awareness is supported by empathy, organizational awareness that enables the leader to discern the relationships and politics of the organization, and service that meets the needs of those connected to the organization.
- b. Relationship management requires developed skills in inspirational leadership to motivate, influence that allows for persuasion, developing others through feedback and guidance, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds that cultivate and maintain relationships, and teamwork and collaboration that support cooperation and team building.

It is suggested that effective leaders will possess at least one competence from each of the four fundamental areas of emotional intelligence.

Primal Leadership consistently explains the behavior that supports emotional intelligence in the context of our neuroanatomy. “Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head—feeling and thought—meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar” (p. 26). Goleman et al. explore the interconnections between the parts of the brain that control thought and those that manage emotion or feelings. They challenge the traditional attitude of our business culture that gives preference to intellect over emotion on the basis that our emotions are more powerful than our intellect. Valued business attitudes such as enthusiasm, commitment, and independent initiative arise from the deep learning managed by the emotional center of the brain. Though techniques associated with these qualities can be intentionally applied, deep learning does not reach that level without addressing the emotions and can make the difference between a worker who compliantly goes through the motions or passionately commits to the common purpose of the organization.

Emotional intelligence is presented as being demonstrated through six styles of leadership—visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding. The last two, the authors say, “although useful in some very specific situations, should be applied with caution” (p. 53). These are presented not as static styles practiced as a hallmark of the individual leader but rather as a repertoire of choices that the emotionally intelligent leader may draw on as the

leadership context requires. The unique elements and relevant contextual applications of each of these particular styles are well defined for the reader seeking a better understanding of versatility in leadership. This may prove especially helpful for the developing leader who practices the pacesetter or command styles, those that conform to the linear models that deny the value of emotion having a rightful place in the context of organizational leadership.

“Old leaders can learn new tricks” (p. 96). This reveals the authors’ underlying assertion that leadership skills can be learned. It challenges the notion that “leaders are born” (nature) and posits that leaders can be made through intentional learning (nurture). Old behaviors can be changed and emotional intelligence can be acquired. Self-awareness is a critical component of this change process, as is candid assessment by others around a leader. Research referenced reveals that most leaders overestimate the effectiveness of their leadership; as a rule subordinates rate leaders’ skills and behaviors below what the leader perceives of self. Awareness of this tendency is a necessary enabling of the process of learning and change that leads to more effective leadership contribution.

The learning necessary to effect change in old leadership behaviors is referred to as “limbic learning” (p. 102), in contrast to learning centered in the neocortex, which processes and stores information. Limbic learning connects with the emotions and needs a context of practice and repetition. Building emotional intelligence requires an underlying motivation born of sincere desire; concerted effort must occur in an environment where practice of the skills takes precedence over cognitive learning of information. This approach produces sustained learning that is less likely to be forgotten than training that takes place at a traditional workshop or seminar. It is primarily self-directed and happens in the non-linear context of the tumult and possibilities of our relationships.

The journey to developing leadership competency in the arena of emotional intelligence requires the forming of a vision of self that is consistent with principles that support the model. Goleman et al. refer to the creation of a mental model of an ideal self (p. 118) that is congruent with one’s values and dreams. The ideal self is contrasted with the ought self that reflects what others feel or think one should be. Coming to grips with the ideal self is the foundation of the personal visioning process necessary for the deep change required for the development of emotional intelligence. Without it the passion to lead toward a common goal will be lacking. This ideal self is ever-changing due to the dynamic nature of learning development in relationship with others, and as such becomes a lifelong journey. It is the ever-unfolding terminals—where one is as a leader and where one wishes to be. The gap in between provides the setting for learning and growth.

It is common for organizations to focus primarily on the issues and processes within the gap of what a worker is and what one might become. Performance reviews and evaluations can ignore what a person might become by concentrating on what the present seems to indicate that person to be. The gap should not be the primary focus, since it over-emphasizes the competency areas that need work rather than emphasizing people’s abilities. “But that means the capabilities that people value, enjoy, and are most proud of get lost in the process” (p. 137). The time element involved in limbic learning begs us to look differently at assessment and evaluation of those we lead. When applied to leadership, the elements of emotional intelligence employ an expansive transformational view of the members who support the mission of the organization or community.

The book orders steps to learning in Five Discoveries as follows:

1. The ideal self—where change begins. This step asserts that “connecting with one’s dreams releases one’s passion, energy, and excitement about life” (p. 115).

2. The real self, or are you a boiling frog? This step reveals the need to remain steadfastly aware of one's vision and the real self to avoid the imperceptible slide into acceptance and apathy regarding practices and policies of organizations.
3. A learning agenda. This step emphasizes the need to build improvement plans around the vision of the real self rather than the ought self or those ideals established by another person. Goals must be owned by the person setting them if they are to be congruent with the real self.
4. Reconfiguring the brain. This step requires dependence upon implicit learning that takes place tacitly in the course of life and relationships. This sort of learning must be predicated by "three things: Bring bad habits into awareness, consciously practice a better way, and rehearse that new behavior at every opportunity until it becomes automatic" (p. 156).
5. The power of relationships. This step stresses the importance of the people who help one in the journey through the gap that leads to the envisioned ideal self. This discovery recognizes that established relationships will often resist the change necessary for one to reach the ideal self goal. Positive groups and encouraging individuals who relate with candor and trust provide necessary help in the process of positive change.

The learning process necessarily begins with change in the individual, but Goleman et al. insist that concentrating on individual change is inadequate to accomplish change toward creating emotionally intelligent organizations. In order to bring about such change in an organization or team, it is necessary to focus on the norms and culture reflected in these groups. This begins with "an understanding of the emotional reality and norms of the team and the culture of the organization" (p. 173), and leads to an ideal vision of the group or organization. It also assumes that the individuals within the group will share a common vision with that of the hopeful organization. The book cites the work of James Surowiecki (2005), relating to the intelligence of crowds being greater than that of individuals. Goleman et al. insist that this is true only when the group exhibits emotional intelligence. Group emotional intelligence occurs when resonance marks the state of the group. Unwise use of command or pacesetting leadership styles by the group leader can neutralize the emotional intelligence of the group or even on a greater scale, that of a large organization.

Collective emotional intelligence is what sets top-performing teams and organizations apart from average. Such organizations demonstrate "the same capabilities as emotionally intelligent individuals: self awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship management" (p. 177).

In order to reach such a positive state, leaders must be willing to actively question the emotional reality and the cultural norms that underlie the behavior of the organizations they serve. *Primal Leadership* presents the paradox of changing organizations from the bottom up by insisting that the principles of the model must first be embraced at the top level of the organization (p. 219). This requires leaders to "focus on people" (p. 221) and the foundational bonds that support a healthy working relationship in good times and bad. Top leaders must demonstrate what the ideal vision looks like as well as ensuring that organizational structures, job design, relationship norms, and systems and performance expectations are consistent with the vision. "Creating organizations that are emotionally intelligent is ultimately the leader's responsibility" (p. 222).

Primal Leadership recognizes the established maxim that by nature organizations resist change. Routine and status quo provide a context wherein people carry out their professional jobs in established systems that produce minimal resistance and stress. The development of a new lead-

ership style challenges this comfortable context and requires learning that leads to fundamental change. Goleman et al. project the necessity of making leadership development a strategic priority that emanates from the core of the enterprise. The culture of the organization must be changed. “You can’t ignore culture, and you can’t hope to change it one leader at a time” (p. 232).

Change must be part of a process as opposed to being the goal of a program. A process addresses change and attunement perpetually. There is no terminal point when the process is complete. It addresses the organization holistically by attending to change at three primary levels with a multifaceted process: “the individuals in the organization, the teams in which they work, and the organization’s culture” (p. 234). This approach applies an intellectual understanding of emotional intelligence to organizations by implementing an action-based strategy that leverages the passion and dreams of its members, thus creating sustainable change.

Social, political, economic, and technological changes in our society require a renewed emphasis on the application of emotional intelligence in organizations. People can no longer be viewed as interchangeable parts within our organizations. The functional focus of leadership that marked the industrial period must give way to a focus that attends to the emotional and personal dimensions of our work communities. “Leadership excellence is being redefined in interpersonal terms” (p. 248).

This book should be read by those desiring a deeper understanding of the application of emotional intelligence concepts to life and leadership. The principles set forth within its pages forcefully challenge long-held beliefs about management and leadership as a process that has been driven primarily by analysis and control leading to efficiency. We are compelled to consider the human qualities that influence the effectiveness of our work communities and organizations that enrich society. The passion and enthusiasm that moves people forward in organizations is tied to the human spirit that cannot be managed or controlled without suffering loss to both. *Primal Leadership* begins to fill in the blanks in our understanding of what it takes to optimize the emotional and relational forces that drive commitment beyond the possibilities of managed compliance.

The emergence of authentic relationships and community as a primary driving force in the post-modern world makes it necessary for all who would lead intelligently and effectively in the present context to understand this important dynamic. Goleman et al (2002) help us to understand why emotional and relational resonance matters—the workforce necessary to a society built around technology no longer responds to the command and control methods of the industrial era. Beyond this pragmatic reason we rediscover the dignity of the basic building block of our organizations—the human person. Emotional intelligence applied is the practice of recognizing the need of each to be treated as valuable and deserving of dignity.

After having read multiple scores of books on leadership and management, I would recommend *Primal Leadership* as a must read.

REFERENCES

- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (10th anniversary ed.). New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School.
- Surowiecki, J. (2005). *The wisdom of crowds: Why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies, and nations*. New York: Anchor Books.