

Empathy, intuition, and self-awareness are essential to good leadership, but they can be tricky to hone and dangerous to use.

Eighteen leaders and scholars explore how to manage emotional intelligence.

Leading by Feel

Like it or not, leaders need to manage the mood of their organizations. The most gifted leaders accomplish that by using a mysterious blend of psychological abilities known as emotional intelligence. They're self-aware and empathetic. They can read and regulate their own emotions while intuitively grasping how others feel and gauging their organization's emotional state.

But where does emotional intelligence come from? And how do leaders learn to use it? The management literature (and even common sense) suggests that both nature and nurture feed emotional intelligence. Part genetic predisposition, part life experience, and part old-fashioned training, emotional intelligence emerges in varying degrees from one leader to the next, and managers apply it with varying skill. Wisely and compassionately deployed, emotional intelligence spurs leaders, their people, and their organizations to superior performance; naively or maliciously applied, it can paralyze leaders or allow them to manipulate followers for personal gain.

We invited 18 leaders and scholars (including business executives, leadership researchers, psychologists, a neurologist, a cult expert, and a symphony conductor) to explore the nature and management of emotional intelligence – its sources, uses, and abuses. Their responses differed dramatically, but there were some common themes: the importance of consciously – and conscientiously – honing one's skills, the double-edged nature of self-awareness, and the danger of letting any one emotional intelligence skill dominate.



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