

FORBES &gt; SMALL BUSINESS

# Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important For Leadership—And How To Build It



LaRae Quyy Forbes Councils Member

Forbes Business Council COUNCIL POST | Membership (Fee-Based)



Nov 13, 2024, 07:45am EST

*LaRae Quyy is the founder and CEO of the [Mental Toughness Center](#) and the producer of [Secrets of a Strong Mind](#), an online training program.*



GETTY

Nothing could prepare me for the reaction I would receive when I flashed my FBI badge in the face of a suspect in one of my espionage investigations. I did background checks to ensure the person wasn't a criminal hiding a gun under their jacket. But most folks I interviewed

were successful businesspeople whose only crime might be a willingness to cut corners to make a profit.

If I wanted answers, I needed to take control of an interview, which required emotional intelligence. I needed to accurately gauge the honesty of their answers. Were they telling me what they thought I wanted to hear? Were they scared to tell me the truth? Or were they a foreign spy trying to hide behind lies?

## Leaders need emotional intelligence.

Lauren Landry with the Harvard Business School (HBS) defines emotional intelligence as "the ability to [understand and manage your emotions](#), as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you." She also notes, "The technical skills that helped secure your first promotion might not guarantee your next."

Those were entry-level skills, but in the high-stakes world of C-level leadership, you need to up your game and develop a competitive advantage. You may not find yourself face to face with a foreign spy, but you may need to know whether your team, competitors or clients are hiding facts from you.

---

### MORE FOR YOU

**FBI Warns iPhone, Android Users—Change WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Signal Apps**



**Today's NYT Mini Crossword Clues And Answers For Wednesday, December 11th**



**Mega Millions Jackpot Soars To \$670 Million—Here's How Much A Winner Could Take Home After Taxes**



---

As an FBI agent, [emotional intelligence](#) allowed me to read the person in front of me and control my own reactions if I suspected perfidy or malfeasance.

Aristotle [said](#), "Anyone can become angry...That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy."

As noted in the HBS article, "One of the most common indicators of low emotional intelligence is difficulty managing and expressing emotions... A lack of emotional intelligence skills often results in workplace conflicts and misunderstandings." Insensitivity, emotional outbursts and self-centeredness can also be signs of low emotional intelligence.

According to Daniel Goleman and Cary Cherniss, an [emotionally intelligent leader](#) is likelier to be a high performer, engaged in what they do, satisfied with their work and in a good mood on the job.

## Can emotional intelligence be learned?

Research shows that emotional intelligence may [increase](#) with age. It's an old-fashioned word called maturity, although training can enhance our skills. I've found the training, however, needs to engage the emotional [limbic brain system](#) rather than our thinking cerebral brain.

As outlined in Verywell Mind, [four skills](#) are needed for high emotional intelligence:

1. Perceiving emotions
2. Reasoning with emotions
3. Understanding emotions
4. Managing emotions

They note: "The first item, perceiving emotions, is considered the most basic or the first level of emotional intelligence. The skills progress to the last item, managing emotions, which is regarded as the highest level of emotional intelligence. This involves the ability to manage your emotions and the emotions of others."

Here are three ways to apply emotional intelligence in leadership:

## 1. Remember, talk is cheap.

In business and life, talk is cheap. People often say what they think others want to hear. They may give lip service about taking responsibility for their actions or embracing the hard work needed to overcome upcoming challenges in their job.

As a leader, you need the emotional intelligence to recognize empty promises so you can probe to detect what they are not saying. Follow their actions, not their words. Look at their track record. Do they meet deadlines? Close deals? Fail to follow through? Make vague commitments?

My tip: Pay attention to these red flag warnings. If the behavior continues, reconsider the relationship to protect you and your organization from further disappointment and liabilities.

## 2. Watch yourself.

Emotionally intelligent people are self-aware. They know how to manage their emotions and push the pause button before they react in a way that sabotages them. They know how to back off before turning a perceived grievance into a big deal. Did your boss cut you off in a meeting? Rise above it, and give them the benefit of the doubt. It's not always about you.

Leaders with high self-awareness are often better equipped to remain calm and focused when faced with adversity because they can manage their emotions. They know what drives them, how they operate as individuals and how their actions impact those around them.

Self-awareness is a critical yet often overlooked leadership quality because it can help equip people to [manage stress](#) and maintain composure in high-pressure situations. The ability to lead oneself before leading others is a fundamental principle distinguishing exceptional leaders from the rest.

My tips:

- Practice introspection.
- Seek feedback from others.
- Question your assumptions.
- Identify your biases.
- Intentionally reflect on your behavior.

### **3. Maintain the right attitude.**

Success feeds off positive energy. However, this doesn't mean you bury your head in empty platitudes of forced optimism. I've found positive thinking aids leaders in making better decisions because it allows them to approach challenges with a clear and open mind on both the positive and negative outcomes.

Positivity is not a Pollyanna approach that ignores the negative, nor is it a doom-and-gloom outlook that always expects the worst. Instead, it is a mindset that helps to weigh all options more effectively and encourages calculated risks. When leaders show positivity and confidence, they inspire team members to strive for excellence and take ownership of their work.

Not only are negative people unpleasant to be around, but their attitudes can be infectious and affect morale. Positive thinkers don't turn a blind eye to high performers if they bring negative energy to the office. They also don't waste valuable energy trying to manage toxic people, whether it's in the office or their personal lives.

My tip: Use phrases like, "I can get better, and so can you. This is what really matters. What if we tried it this way, and this could help?"

Emotional intelligence is a critical skill for effective leadership. It enables leaders to manage stress, navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and

make informed decisions.

---

**Forbes Business Council** is the foremost growth and networking organization for business owners and leaders. [Do I qualify?](#)

---

*Follow me on [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).*



**LaRae Quay**

LaRae Quay is the founder and CEO of the [Mental Toughness Center](#) and the producer of Secrets of a Strong Mind, an online training program. Read... **Read More**

Editorial Standards

Forbes Accolades

---