

Leadership: The Role of Emotions in Decision-Making

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.

Dale Carnegie

As my colleague and I prepare for the next round of Authentic Leadership workshops, I have been reflecting on emotions in the workplace.

In the past, emotions have had a bad wrap in the business world.

Good decision-making has typically highlighted clear logic, rational analysis, and excellent critical thinking. All of these venerate cool logic over messy things like emotions, intuition or gut feelings.

In fact, with some organizations, the mantra has been “when you come to work, leave emotions at home!” Yep – hang it like you would a coat on a coat stand before you enter the work place.

Emotional Intelligence

Fortunately though, we now have a greater appreciation of the rightful place of emotions in our work lives as well. Effective managers and leaders are those who not only have the intellectual and technical smarts but also have good regard for emotions. They are aware of their own and other peoples’ feelings and emotions and can activate, inspire and respond to these at the right time and in an appropriate manner.

Emotional intelligence (EI or EQ) is the domain that embraces this.

This includes skills such as self-awareness, self- management, authenticity, social awareness and social skills or relationship management.

Marketers and those in sales have always told us, “People buy on emotions but later justify with logic.” Likewise in our organizations – whether consciously or unconsciously - our feelings and emotions have a strong impact on our behavior, decision-making and performance. Our levels of engagement, morale, commitment and well being all get impacted.

If you have any doubt, just reflect back to an earlier workplace and manager who inspired you and was great to work with compared to someone who had the opposite effect.

When you think about these two managers with different styles, what feelings come up for you?

And what was the impact of that relationship on your performance, decision-making and ultimately your career trajectory?

Logic or emotions

The reality is we need both – logic and rationality as well as feelings and emotions. It is not either/or. It is about embracing the both.

Sadly we do not get much education and training in the emotional domain.

By the time we hit the workplace, all our unresolved conflicts and unhelpful communication patterns, needs and desires get played out often with negative consequences.

But the good news is that the skills of emotional intelligence can be learned anytime in our lives.

Emotional Reasoning

While self-awareness is a fundamental skill/competency of EI, in this blog I would like to highlight the facet of emotional reasoning.

This is what helps us combine and factor in feelings and emotions along with facts, information and data to reach even richer possibilities and decisions, which may have been overlooked.

We often see this in change management initiatives. For example, the roll out of expensive organizational change strategies without fully factoring in the human side of peoples feeling and reactions through this change process.

Naturally this results in huge people and financial cost which could have been mitigated.

Developing your Leadership EQ

Here are some things you can do:

- Ask people about not just their thoughts but feelings about certain initiatives
- If you see a team member feeling stressed and overwhelmed, reach out and offer support
- In team meetings, go around the group and each team member shares “where they are at.” This enables people to express their feelings so they are not ‘sitting on things.’
- Recognize that unless peoples feelings are first heard and acknowledged, you are not going to go far, no matter how cogent and logical your offer maybe
- Be more tuned to not just the words of what people are saying but also the underlying feelings and emotions

- Learn more about your team members motivators – their pain and pleasure points
- Be willing to share your own authentic feelings e.g. “My concern about this is that”or “I feel we may not be as customer focused as we can be by.....”
- As the leader during tough times, your people will be especially looking to you as to how you are coping and reacting. Be willing to share your authentic story including any feelings of “appropriate” vulnerability. This helps build more trust in the team.
- Make a conscious effort to involve and engage people in decisions that affect their work. The rewards will be worth it as it adds to your and your organizations emotional and financial bottom-line.

And finally

If you are a manager and leader, perhaps you are left questioning as to how you stack up on your EI skills. If so drop me a line at jasbindar@jasbindarsingh.com. It might be the best EI decision you make! 😊

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