

## Leading with Emotional Intelligence

# BRINGING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO THE TEAM LEVEL

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If you have been reading this ezine for some time now, you probably have noticed that a lot of my work had to do with developing Emotional Intelligence in leaders with the aim of deepening positive impact in their respective teams and organizations.

This month, I would like to choose a slightly different angle and present the team as an entity, a “body” in itself. Let me address several important questions:

As a leader:

- What is the meaning of a “team with high emotional intelligence”?
- What are the benefits in developing emotional intelligence in your team?
- What are the steps in developing emotional intelligence in your team?

A few weeks ago, I received tremendous inspiration from an unfinished book that I have had for a long time. The book is called “The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace” and is composed of 12 papers from various authors. Although published more than 10 years ago, it still contains much value.

One of the papers that I had not read is entitled “Group Emotional Intelligence and its Influence on Group Effectiveness” by Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff. In this ezine, I am going to share with you insights specifically from this paper in relation to the questions mentioned above.

Let me start by asking: what is the meaning of a “team with high emotional intelligence” and what are the benefits for you as a leader?

A “team with high emotional intelligence” can be defined as a team where emotions are processed in a way that leads to effective interactions, a condition for high performance. In a team, emotions run high. Sometimes they are very obvious to everyone yet on other occasions, they may be well below the surface. The way emotions get processed will determine whether team members will contribute to effective interactions and lead towards improved teamwork or create disruptions within themselves.

The authors of the paper make two very interesting points: First, emotions are processed in a non-random manner. Second, emotions are processed according to norms that the group has adopted over time. This is very obvious when looking at cultural differences. For example, the Japanese and the Americans do not handle emotions in the same way since they have different norms.

These norms are basically habits (that people in your team have taken when it comes to dealing with emotions). Furthermore, a norm that the authors mention is to “create resources for working with emotions” (p. 147). This includes allowing people to express their emotions and “accepting emotions as an inherent part of group life”. In other words, making it a habit to express and to listen to emotions, instead of ignoring or covering them is needed.

Thus, these important questions become relevant: **How would you like emotions to be processed in your team? What norms do you find most useful?** There is some work to be done here in order to clarify this. Of course, this is the kind of work that can be greatly profitable if done **together with the rest of the team**. A team seminar along the lines of “how are we presently dealing with emotions in our team and how do we want to deal with them in the future?” can prove very rewarding.

More so, how do you bring these norms to life and what can you do about it? Actually, this invites us to reflect on the origin of these norms. People in your team probably came from a diverse set of family and cultural backgrounds; therefore, their own norms regarding emotional management are likely to be different as well. The ability to bring them slowly to common emotional habits will take some dedicated effort. But the good news is: aside from you, other team members can also make it happen.

The authors identified five sources of leverage to shape these norms:

- formal leader(s)
- informal leader(s)
- “courageous followers”
- training
- organizational culture

As a formal leader, your job is to act as a role model of the norms you would like your team to adopt. For example, if you would like your team to be more comfortable in expressing emotions, you should be seen as a leader who possesses this ability. Keep in mind you have other ways to influence your team. Paying special attention to two kinds of team members, the informal leaders and “courageous followers”, also reinforces your desired outcome.

Informal leaders are the ones in your team who do not have any formal authority yet, still have a lot of influence on others, mostly due to their experiences and/or personalities. “Courageous followers” are the ones who are truly excited about developing emotional intelligence in the team. They are the enthusiasts. By convincing your informal leaders and supporting efforts by your “courageous followers”, you can expect a lot of additional momentum for your own initiatives to take your team to the next level of emotional intelligence.

**Have you identified your informal leaders and your “courageous leaders”? If not, perhaps it is time to do so. If yes, are you supporting them enough? Is there anything else you can do to maximize their commitment to pursue higher emotional intelligence in your team?**

As always, I like to ask questions that will get you to think in hopes that you will gain new insights to be able to lead your team better. It is my hope that today’s questions have served that purpose.



Sebastien Henry is **Progress-U's expert for Emotional Intelligence (EI) and stress management**. He works with executives who want to:

- avoid feeling exhausted and uprooted as their career takes them to the top;
- become more inspiring leaders by developing their Emotional Intelligence (EI) at work; and, as a consequence
- be able to motivate their people more and retain the best.

Having worked in an Asia-Pacific regional position at a multinational company, Sebastien has experimented extensively on how to develop Emotional Intelligence in his daily work life. He is the author of "Emotional Intelligence and leadership in Asia. Using emotions to lead and inspire your people", to be published in 2010.

He firmly believes in action, and the tools he uses and shares are derived from several areas of his life: his business experience as a corporate executive, of course, but also his intensive practice of mountaineering and rock climbing (7a on-sight and more than 50 alpine routes), his commitment to teach and coach prisoners, and his daily meditations for more than six years.

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- Certified Trainer of the "EQ Impact Learning" program (Talentsmart, USA)

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