

## **Emotional Leadership Through Emotional Intelligence: High Achievers Do It; Low Achievers Don't**

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In its broadest definition, leadership is the influence one has on another's behavior such as a leader and follower. Leaders influence behavioral change in followers to go further, try harder, and do better than anyone ever thought possible. As a compelling force for behavioral change, leadership effects change at the emotional level where lasting change takes root and flourishes. The process of leading creates a symbiotic relationship between leader and follower when leaders take into consideration follower diversity they join the team. Followers come in all shapes, sizes, backgrounds and belief systems. They come with a variety of talents, gifts, and abilities as well as emotional maturity. The plight of a leader is to meet followers at their point of vulnerability and compel them to move past that point to reach homeostasis. The primary difference between effective, high achieving leaders and ineffective, low achieving leaders is the ability to move followers beyond their emotional point of vulnerability in a concerted effort to address follower emotions through emotional leadership. Using Reuven BarOn's Five Realms of Emotional Intelligence and 15 underlying scales as a filter, this paper compares the effective traits of high achieving emotional leaders and the ineffective traits of low achieving emotional leaders in an effort to emphasize the importance of emotional leadership through emotional intelligence.

### *Emotional Leadership*

In this current age of information, leaders cannot afford to ignore or even avoid follower emotions in the workplace. The definition of emotional leadership is the leading of followers through the proper identification and management of an array of emotions and influencing the outcome of their subsequent needs. According to Stein & Book (2000), emotions are information and follow logical patterns. They have universals as well as specifics. Leader decisions must incorporate follower emotions about the organization, the department, the culture and/or the project. When a leader disregards follower emotions, follower attention is divided between what they should do and want they want to do. Followers draw the conclusion that since what they feel does not matter to the leader then it does not matter to the organization. For most followers, emotional distress detracts from performance especially when that distress is a result of leader/follower conflict regardless if the leader is a high achieving or low achieving leader. Leading follower emotions should be the first priority for anyone building an organization, changing an organization or simply looking to leave a legacy in an organization.

Emotional Leadership is rooted in BarOn's five realms or relationships of Emotional Quotient (e.g., Emotional Intelligence). They are: The Interpersonal Realm, The Intrapersonal Realm, The Adaptability Realm, The Stress Management Realm, and The Good Mood Realm. An emotionally intelligent leader knows that, "Good relationships

and coping strategies are the key to our success...from the initial bonding between parent and child to the ability of a manager to bring out the best in [their] employees” (Stein & Book, p. 2). According to Bar-On, a balance in these five realms and their 15 underlying areas equates to good performance but it is noted that not all high achieving leaders strictly adhere to all fifteen areas. A comparison of high performing leaders and low performing leaders in light of BarOn’s Realms of Emotional Intelligence will yield specific steps to take in order to be a highly effective leader in any organization. A closer look at the differences between high achieving leaders and low achieving leaders will help develop the foundation of this comparison.

### *Leaders: High Achieving vs. Low Achieving*

Leaders fall into one of two categories: High Achieving and Low Achieving. High achieving leaders continuously address the emotional needs of followers in an effort to “bring out the best” in them. Effective leaders rating “high” are concerned with, for and about others in addition to company profits, are optimistic about subordinate success as well as their own, and seek ideas from followers and implement the best of these ideas for the good and welfare of the organization. High achieving leaders are good listeners and listen more than they speak. Conversely, low achieving leaders avoid direct communication, distrust subordinates, do not consult followers, and are so preoccupied with their own security that daily activities are designed for self-preservation and not the long-term development of followers and the future of the organization. High achieving leaders are excited about follower aspirations, dreams and successes. They are also saddened by follower failures, fears and miscommunication and work to resolve the problems. Low achieving leaders are excited about follower failures, and guided by the concept of “let them fail,” claim to use follower failure as a teaching opportunity when in reality even minute failures are used against them down the road on an employment review or, worse yet, through public humiliation. Low achieving leaders provide followers with some but not all of the information needed to carry out the task, restrict communication, and impose deadlines that cause anxiety, fear and stress. Low achieving leaders overload followers they no longer need in an effort to create burnout and subsequent failure to justify the impending termination due to poor performance. Low achieving leaders disregard follower emotions while high achieving leaders embrace emotional leadership through Emotional Intelligence. A closer look at BarOn’s Realms of Emotional Intelligence will help with the comparison.

### *The Intrapersonal Realm*

BarOn’s Intrapersonal Realm is the ability to know and manage the self in the five areas of emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-regard, and self-actualization. Effective emotional leadership starts with the leader’s intrapersonal realm and how they handle themselves. Successful leaders must value who they are (e.g., self-esteem) and understand what they can and cannot do (e.g., self efficacy) before they can value those that follow them. Leaders who recognize how they feel and how that feeling impacts followers will govern their reactions to good and bad news accordingly. When the emphasis in today’s workplace is turning data into information and information into

knowledge, all organizational information is considered important. No matter what the source, whether grapevine, speculation, or hard facts, followers who seek to keep their leader informed are less likely to provide information if the leader is inclined to “shoot the messenger” as a reaction to the information. For high achieving leaders, any and all information is welcome, analyzed and considered. Low achieving leaders are more concerned with self-preservation and quickly point the finger in order to place blame. Information provided by followers to a low achieving leader is met with cynicism, ridicule and punishment more from leader fear than for the provided information. Low achieving leaders in the BarOn’s self-awareness realm are toxic, destructive to organizational balance and dehumanizing to followers.

High achieving leaders are articulate, persuasive and assertive. They say what they mean and mean what they say. They stand their ground and do not back down when their thoughts, ideas, and understandings are challenged. However, high achieving leaders are willing to change their mind when they find a better answer than their own. Unfortunately, low achieving leaders change their minds often, blame others for their failures, and manipulate followers to think the way they want them to think. Low achieving leaders seek out followers who are in need of social affirmation, psychological healing, and/or financial assistance and satisfy some or all of those needs to create a sense of servitude holding the following thought over their head, “Since I satisfied your need(s), you must satisfy mine.” Unfortunately for these followers, the needs they are required to satisfy in their leader are more than anyone can satisfy or should satisfy. Low achieving leaders are more self-centered than other-centered and their needs are not in the best interest of the organization and/or the development of followers.

Interpersonal leaders who fall under the category of high achieving are self-directed, self-controlled, and independent. They are a step ahead in their thinking about the future of the organization, its stakeholders and what is best for all involved. High achieving leaders consider diversity amongst followers and promote the balance between different religions, age, gender, race, and beliefs. To be independent requires high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and low levels of narcissism. It requires a lack of passive aggressive behavior that when left unchecked, can develop into maladaptive and even pathological behavior over the long term. High achieving leaders address problems directly by confronting issues and resolving/managing conflict quickly. High achieving leaders know that complete harmony in the workplace is not possible but they strive for balance amongst followers. Low achieving leaders often create dissention through favoritism, gender bias, and/or other unequal measures. Low achieving leaders do not rise above the day-to-day commonality of workplace politics. Often times they are at the heart of it.

Self-regard and self-actualization are critical areas for high achieving leaders. Self-regard is the realization of strengths and weaknesses of a leader’s talents, gifts and abilities and the subsequent contentment with the results. The causal effect of contentment in the area of self-regard affords the high achieving leader the opportunity to reach their potential and be happy with it. BarOn calls this “self-actualization.” Low achieving leaders are tied up in the realm of self-regard, emphasizing only strengths and denying weaknesses, and

never reach contentment with who they are and what they can and cannot do. Unfortunately for low achieving leaders, without self-regard, self-actualization is not possible and the full Interpersonal Realm is inaccessible.

### *Interpersonal Realm*

BarOn's second realm of Emotional Intelligence is the interpersonal or the "people skills" realm. In this realm, leader relationships are assessed in the three areas: empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. High achieving leaders understand that followers are emotional creations who think, feel, get excited about success and fear failure. High achieving leaders empathize with follower emotions, whether it is to celebrate the victories or console the grief in failure. Low achieving leaders take sides and point fingers to either take credit for follower success or humiliate followers for failing. Low achieving leaders destroy workplace camaraderie, diminish workplace competition, and drive hard working followers to seek employment elsewhere.

Both high achieving leaders and followers have a sense of responsibility to be cooperative and contributing members of society. Social responsibility starts at the follower level and extends throughout the organization to its stakeholders. To be a cooperative and contributing member of society requires both leader and follower to obey the established governmental laws, respect the diversity in a multicultural society, and do better today than yesterday. Low achieving leaders believe the organization as well as society is a better place because they exist. It is their opinion that once they exit the scene, the organization is doomed to fail.

High achieving leaders know that interpersonal relationships are emotionally satisfying, mutually beneficial, two-way connections between leader and follower. Interpersonal relationships are satisfying due to a high level of trust built over a long period of time and that both leader and follower will not let the other down except for extenuating circumstances beyond control. Low achieving leaders disregard trust and emotional satisfaction to operate under Machiavelli-like conditions where it is better to be respected than loved. Low achieving leaders are too stringent to be adaptable to a changing environment.

### *Adaptability*

In BarOn's realm of Adaptability, high achieving leaders adjust their thoughts and feelings to changing conditions and view the world as it really is rather than how they want it to be. They define problems and take steps to resolve them. Unlike low achieving leaders, high achievers don't mix reality with unrealistic outcomes that, no matter how hard followers try, will never come to fruition. In the realm of adaptability, low achieving leaders continue to do the same things over and over again each time expecting a different outcome. They force followers to perform tedious tasks designed to show loyalty rather than actually accomplish something of importance. Due to their lack of adaptability, low achieving leaders generate debilitating stress in their followers because they fail to manage it in their own careers.

### *Stress Management*

The distinct area separating high achieving leaders from low achieving leaders is the realm of Stress Management. High achieving leaders remain cool, calm, and collected in the process of leading. They control the impulse to react by either resisting or delaying reaction when faced with a major catastrophe or disruption in daily activities. High achieving leaders are constructive rather destructive when life throws them curve balls knowing that life is not without its challenges and everything can work together for good in the end. Low achieving leaders are constantly under pressure to perform and to succeed. Stress comes through poor planning, lack of purpose in personal and professional life, and a general distrust of subordinates limiting the delegation of tasks to accomplish the overall goal. Low achieving leaders have difficulty delegating to followers and must complete and/or micromanage all of the tasks to insure perfection. In the end, low achieving leader perfectionism causes failure rather than success and perfectionism negates good mood.

### *Good Mood*

The final realm of BarOn's Emotional Intelligence is the positive mental attitude that creates "good mood." Good Mood is comprised of optimism and happiness. Optimism is the maintenance of a positive outlook in the face of adversity. Optimism relies heavily on the underlying scales of the Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Realms in order to come to fruition. High achieving leaders must first feel good about themselves before they can effectively lead others. Similar to Good Mood, happiness or the ability to enjoy life, relationships with others along with the ability to obtain joy from daily activities also relies on the Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Realms in order to be realized. For the high achieving leader, optimism and general happiness is what attracts good followers to them. High achieving leaders use optimism and happiness to motivate followers to rise above mediocrity, to persevere, and to persist through the high and lows of task execution. Followers of high achieving leaders do respond to a pat on the back, an "atta boy" or simple a peaceful smile that says, "Everything is going to be alright." Good mood is a result of proper stress management, adapting to the current environment, and good personal relationships with others. Good mood exists in high achieving leaders who are efficacious, value themselves as well as others and strive to be the best they can be with what they are given. Good mood is the quintessential emotional intelligence realm and one that high achieving leaders are committed to, while low achieving leaders slip into and out of this realm depending on the circumstances of the moment.

### *Conclusion*

There are obvious overlaps in BarOn's realms of Emotional Intelligence for high achieving leaders and yet low achieving leaders either ignore or disregard some or all of these realms to the detriment of their followers. Successful leadership starts with emotional leadership by focusing on follower emotions as part of the leadership process. Without it, followers fail. The truth is when followers fail, leadership fails.

## References

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