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# Emotional Intelligence

## Leading with Compassion and Insight in Today's Workplace

In today's complex work environment—chock-full of diverse teams, remote workers, and multi-generational differences—strong leadership isn't just about how well you strategize or execute an initiative. Now more than ever it's about emotional intelligence (aka, emotional quotient).

Don't be scared off by the term emotional intelligence (EI)! Simply put, EI is the ability to understand and manage your emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you<sup>1</sup>.

Or, in the very popular and immortal words of Maya Angelou, **"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."**

Before you read on, pause and take this [Emotional Intelligence quiz](#)<sup>2</sup> to understand how well you label, express, and regulate emotions.

<sup>1</sup>[online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership](https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership)

<sup>2</sup>[psychologytoday.com/us/tests/personality/emotional-intelligence-test](https://psychologytoday.com/us/tests/personality/emotional-intelligence-test)

In short, EI is the leadership superpower that enables us to guide with empathy, composure, and resilience. Leaders who have strong EI don't just react—they listen, adapt, and lead from a place of understanding. The leaders who will thrive tomorrow are those who lead with both heart and head.

## Understanding Emotional Intelligence... and How to Increase Yours!

To develop true emotional intelligence, you need to understand its key parts and how to strengthen each one along your leadership journey. ACS has identified the following components as the most important and have outlined their benefits in the workplace (and beyond!), examples of what they look like in action, and tips to build on each.

### Self-Awareness

Leaders with high EI recognize their emotions and how emotions impact their decisions during crises, enabling composure and rational choices under pressure.

- ▶ **Benefits:** Improved decision-making, humility, confidence.
- ▶ **Example:** Leader acknowledging their stress before a team meeting.
- ▶ **Tips to build your EI:** Journaling, mindfulness, feedback loops.

### Self-Regulation

Effective leaders manage emotions, remaining calm and adaptable in challenges, which is crucial for sound decision-making and stability during crises.

- ▶ **Benefits:** Builds trust, maintains professionalism.
- ▶ **Example:** Staying calm during a crisis instead of assigning blame.
- ▶ **Tips to build your EI:** Pause/reflect before responding, deep breathing, reappraisal techniques<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>[www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/cognitive-reappraisal](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/cognitive-reappraisal)

Self-Awareness

Self-Regulation

Motivation

Empathy

Social Skills

### Motivation

Leaders with strong EI are resilient and purpose-driven, inspiring teams to persevere through adversity and maintaining morale and a focus on shared goals.

- ▶ **Benefits:** Action with purpose.
- ▶ **Example:** A leader who prioritizes purpose-driven goals over their own bonuses.
- ▶ **Tips to build your EI:** Set intrinsic goals, recognize team progress, maintain optimism.

### Empathy

Essential in crises, empathy helps leaders understand and address the emotions of team members and stakeholders, fostering trust and informed decision-making.

- ▶ **Benefits:** Strengthens relationships, promotes inclusivity.
- ▶ **Example:** A leader who adjusts deadlines after recognizing employee burnout.
- ▶ **Tips to build your EI:** Active listening, asking thoughtful questions, non-verbal awareness.

### Social Skills

Critical for crisis leadership, strong social skills enable effective communication, relationship-building, and collaboration with diverse stakeholders to find solutions.

- ▶ **Benefits:** Conflict resolution, collaboration, culture-building.
- ▶ **Example:** A manager who unites a diverse team during change.
- ▶ **Tips to build your EI:** Conflict resolution training, inclusive language, open communication.

### EI vs. IQ: Which matters more?

**IQ** is about how well you think—solving problems, analyzing data, and understanding complex ideas.

**EI** is about how well you relate—managing your emotions, understanding others, and building strong connections.

In leadership, EI often makes a bigger impact than IQ. It helps you communicate clearly, build trust, handle stress, and bring out the best in your team—all of which matter more than just being smart.

Leaders who cultivate these core elements of EI are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, connect authentically, and lead teams through both challenge and change.

## Why EI Matters in Leadership

By building emotional intelligence, leaders don't just react to the world around them—they respond with clarity, compassion, impact, and empathy.

Strong EI involves:

- ▶ Actively listening to others (check out the [Key Active Listening Techniques tool](#) from ACS!)
- ▶ Recognizing and validating others' feelings
- ▶ Demonstrating genuine care and concern for others' well-being

With strong EI, leaders are able to put themselves in the shoes of their team members, stakeholders, and the broader community, allowing them to make more informed decisions, build trust, and foster positive relationships.

Bottom line? Being a leader with strong EI doesn't just mean you're a good person—it helps create a healthy workplace culture, improves team performance, and guides people through challenges with empathy and clarity. Leaders who lack emotional intelligence often create problems like poor teamwork, low motivation, less productivity, and higher turnover.

## Need help with your EI? ACS has the tool!

The new Leading with Emotional Intelligence Tool supports

leaders in moving from quick reactions to thoughtful responses by listening, adjusting, and leading with care. It also complements the content of this newsletter so you can start learning on your own to combine compassion with clear direction.

Use the Leading with Emotional Intelligence Tool to:

- Better understand others
- Communicate with care and clarity
- Lead with confidence, kindness, and fairness

Start using the ACS Leading with Emotional Intelligence Tool today. Choose one action, apply it in your next conversation, and lead with greater impact, empathy, and intention.



When a leader can't handle emotions and relationships well, it can slow down—and sometimes cause havoc within the whole organization.

## Emotionally Intelligent Leaders in Action

A great example of EI in action comes from First Lady Michelle Obama, who often shares personal stories about her upbringing, challenges, and family life when giving speeches or interviews. In her now-famous speech at the [2016 Democratic National Convention](#), she spoke about her experiences growing up on the South Side of Chicago and the hopes she had for her daughters. Her vulnerability and authenticity helped her connect emotionally with millions, making her message relatable and inspiring.

Here are some of her words in EI action:

**What she said:** *"I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves, and I watch my daughters—two beautiful, intelligent, black young women—playing with their dogs on the White House lawn."*

**How it showed EQ:** Michelle showed her awareness of history and the complex emotions tied to it, while grounding her message in personal experience.

**What she said:** *"Because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters and all our sons and daughters now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States."*

**How it showed EQ:** Michelle connected hope and progress to personal and national growth, inspiring belief in possibility.

**What she said:** *"When they go low, we go high."*

**How it showed EQ:** Michelle committed to dignity and integrity, emphasizing emotional self-control and leading by example.

Here and in so many other examples, the First Lady exemplified how emotional intelligence can inspire connection, resilience, and leadership that uplifts others.

## EI in Today's Evolving Workplace

As organizations navigate change, complexity, and a new generation of workers, EI is the skill that helps leaders connect, communicate, and lead effectively. Why does this matter now more than ever?:

### The Rise of Human-Centered Workplaces

The old “command-and-control” leadership model is fading. Today’s most effective leaders embrace collaboration, empathy, and inclusion to unlock team potential. Emotional intelligence is key to making that shift; emotionally intelligent leaders are better at fostering psychological safety and inclusive cultures, which directly improves performance and innovation<sup>4</sup>.

### Digital Age Demands

With hybrid work, global teams, and nonstop change, leaders must navigate stress, miscommunication, and cultural complexity. EI is one of the top skills needed for the future of work, especially in managing remote teams and leading through change<sup>5</sup>—it helps leaders stay calm, communicate across differences, and manage uncertainty with grace.

### Gen Z and Millennial Expectations

Younger generations are looking for more than just a paycheck—they’re seeking purpose, transparency, and emotionally intelligent leadership. Gen Z and Millennials place a high value on mental health, open communication, and leaders who align with their values<sup>6</sup>. Emotional intelligence helps leaders meet these expectations by building trust, supporting well-being, and leading with authenticity.

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<sup>4</sup> [hbr.org/resources/pdfs/comm/fourseasons/TheEIAdvantage.pdf](https://hbr.org/resources/pdfs/comm/fourseasons/TheEIAdvantage.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work](https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work)

<sup>6</sup> [www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html](https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html)

## EI in Leadership is a Non-Negotiable

Leaders who develop their emotional intelligence are better prepared for the realities of today's workplace and more likely to earn the trust, motivation, and commitment of tomorrow's workforce. By embracing EI, they create workplaces where people feel seen, valued, and inspired to bring their best selves every day. As [Simon Sinek](#), bestselling author and motivational speaker known for his insights on EI, said, "Leadership is not about being in charge. It's about taking care of those in your charge."

## WANT MORE?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll free at 1-877-372-0166,  
or visit our website at [advocacyandcommunication.org](http://advocacyandcommunication.org).

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### Spring 2025 Newsletter



### Winter Newsletter Part 1, 2025



### Winter Newsletter Part 2, 2025

