

Communicating Like a Leader

Objective

To consider the facets of emotional intelligence that good leadership requires and plan to improve your own.

You Should Know

You are probably aware of supervisors who do not seem to care about employees' feelings or opinions. But in today's workplace, leadership is about helping others achieve their goals by meeting their needs and understanding their concerns. To do that, leaders must have emotional intelligence: the ability to acknowledge and work with others' emotions while being aware of their own.

Of course, developing emotional intelligence is not only helpful at work. But if your work goals include ascending the ladder of responsibility, here are some specific skills to consider as you prepare yourself for that next promotion.

Actively listen. Effective leaders know how to listen to make people feel heard and understood. Some characteristics of active listening include:

- Using body language to focus on the other and ensuring your body conveys the same message as your words.
- Turning off phones and other distractions to convey how important that person is to you.
- Not interrupting.
- Being curious and asking questions.
- Inviting others' ideas and opinions using open-ended questions (that cannot be answered with a yes or no).
- Summarizing what you have heard to check if you got it right.
- When appropriate, sharing a plan on how you will use this information.

Understand different communication styles. Great communicators read others and understand how to get their message across so people can hear it. For example, if you can see someone is shy or frightened, you know it is best to be gentle and supportive in your approach for them to hear you. When you interact with a loud, rowdy group, you will be more authoritative. Similarly, good communicators take time to learn why people do what they do: what motivates them, how they give and receive feedback, and how they learn. Then, the leader can adapt the ways in which they inspire, evaluate, and teach.

Empathy. If you want to increase your emotional intelligence, practice empathy. Empathy is not sympathy, which involves pity or sorrow; it is listening so well you can walk in another person's shoes. It is opening your heart to another in your desire to understand them.

Two qualities of empathy are curiosity and non-judgment. If you let others see you are genuinely curious and caring about their experiences, they will open up more. If you are

secretly judging them, they will feel it. To be nonjudgmental, you must be aware of your biases and be willing to set them aside to understand the other person.

The more you can acknowledge others' feelings and experiences, the more they will feel valued and understood, and the more respect and trust your relationship will have—which leads to more success for both of you.

Communicate well. Good leaders communicate clearly, simply, and concisely. They use emotional intelligence to communicate effectively the first time, avoiding mistakes, conflicts, and having to revisit issues.

- **Clarity.** People must clearly understand what is asked of them. If they are not delivering what you want, perhaps you did not communicate clearly enough.
- **Simplicity.** State goals or requests so everyone knows what they are working toward and the priorities.
- **Conciseness.** Respect others' time by being brief and saying only what is important. Make your words count.
- **Honesty.** Honesty builds trust. When people trust you, they will invest of themselves, be open to change, and even take risks.
- **Openness.** When people know you will tell them what is happening in the workplace, they feel more secure. When you openly share goals, opportunities, challenges, achievements, and mistakes, they are more likely to take ownership, share ideas, and genuinely care.

Catch them doing something right. Great leaders are always looking for opportunities to thank, praise, and publicly acknowledge those they lead. When it comes time for any negative feedback, they have established a healthy, secure relationship, and that feedback will be received with less defensiveness and more willingness to change.

What to Do

Evaluate yourself in terms of the areas above in the table below. You can also ask people at work to help you evaluate yourself. If you think of other areas you want to work on, add them in the "Other" lines.

Similarly, once you choose an area to work on, you can let those people know what you are doing, and ask for guidance, support, and feedback.

What I'm Doing Well	How I Can Improve/ Skills I Need to Build	Action Steps I Will Take
Active listening		
Understand communication styles		
Empathy		
Communicate well		
Catch them doing something right		

Reflections on This Exercise

Once you have identified some action steps, write a very specific plan for when, where, and how you will complete them.

You don't have to do everything at once. Choose one or two action steps that feel doable and satisfying to start with. Avoid overwhelming yourself—set yourself up for success so you gain confidence and momentum.

What is your first action step, and when will you take it?

Are you surprised about what you are already doing well?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this activity?
