

data show that, on average, people's emotional intelligence tends to increase as they age. But the specific leadership competencies that are based on emotional intelligence don't necessarily come through life experience. For example, one of the most common complaints I hear about leaders, particularly newly promoted ones, is that they lack empathy. The problem is that they were promoted because they were outstanding individual performers, and being a solo achiever doesn't teach you the skills necessary to understand other people's concerns.

Leaders who are motivated to improve their emotional intelligence can do so if they're given the right information, guidance, and support. The information they need is a candid assessment of their strengths and limitations from people who know them well and whose opinions they trust. The guidance they need is a specific developmental plan that uses naturally occurring workplace encounters as the laboratory for learning. The support they need is someone to talk to as they practice how to handle different situations, what to do when they've blown it, and how to learn from those setbacks. If leaders cultivate these resources and practice continually, they can develop specific emotional intelligence skills—skills that will last for years.

## Watch the Language

**Colleen Barrett** is the president and COO of Dallas-based Southwest Airlines.

I've always felt that my intuition was pretty darn good, and I think I can read people well. I rely a ton on my gut. I know the mood of our different work groups. I know the expectations of our employees. I think people are generally born with a predisposition for this type of emotional awareness. But I certainly believe you can enhance your ability just from experience and learning. I've probably gotten better at it over the years because I read and listen to everything, and I'm constantly observing. I watch body language and how people interact.

The other day, I was talking to one of our officers, and he said, "How do you do that?" and I said, "How do I do what?" He was referring to a meeting we'd both been at earlier. I'd asked

one of the presenters at the meeting, a fellow who reported to this officer, if he was feeling OK. The officer thought the employee was fine, but, it turns out, the poor guy had had a pretty traumatic experience in his personal life the night before. His presentation went well, but he seemed off to me, distracted. I suppose in order to have seen that, I must have been fairly attuned to what this fellow's presentations were usually like.

I often communicate on a passionate, emotional level—which can be a detriment, particularly for a woman in a predominantly male leadership group, as ours was for many years.

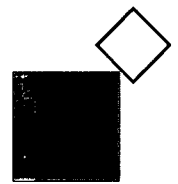
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There were times when I'd launch in on an issue and make gut-level assertions like, "Our customers feel this," and "Our employees feel that." Though everyone in the group would probably deny it, I know that part of their reaction to my outbursts was, "Oh, that's just Colleen, and she's on a tangent," and they would tend to disregard what I was saying. I've learned to rely on calmer people around me to give me those raised eyebrows that say, "Lower the passion a little bit, and people will listen more." When I'm making my arguments, I have to really prepare and try to be—and this is very difficult for me—factual and dispassionate.

## Build Pathways

**Steven Gutstein** ([gutstein@connectionscenter.com](mailto:gutstein@connectionscenter.com)) is a psychologist, autism expert, and codirector of Connections Center for Family and Personal Development in Houston.

I work with autistic children, a population typically defined by its lack of emotional intelligence. People with autism can't connect—indeed, they aren't really interested in connecting emotionally with others. Traditionally, the therapeutic approach with these kids has been to teach them to fake it. They are urged to make



eye contact with others, to repress whatever distracting behaviors they may have, and to use social scripts. Many of these therapies have the appearance of being successful. People with autism do learn the scripts, and some even blend in.

The problem is, faking it never ceases to be work. So as autistic children become adults, they stop putting on the show. Among adults with Asperger's syndrome (a form of autism marked by average or above-average IQ), fewer than 12% hold jobs. Only 3% leave home. These findings make the case profoundly that one gets only so far on IQ. People need to connect emotionally, and with flexibility, in order to succeed. These findings also demonstrate that traditional therapies have not been successful at improving quality of life for autistic people.

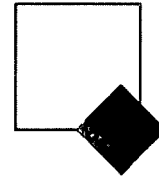
My approach to teaching emotional intelligence skills to children with autism, which I call "relationship development intervention" (RDI), takes a different tack. It begins with a belief that people with autism can be taught to value relationships, to seek out interactions that are not merely transactional ("I will deal with you because there is something I want from you") but where the whole point is to enjoy the shared

### **If people with autism can learn emotional intelligence, anyone can.**



experience. Nonautistic people begin to have these kinds of relationships early in life; at about ten months, most babies start developing the capacity for social referencing, the appreciation that *my* actions should take into account *your* emotions. We now know from neuroimaging that at this stage some critical neural pathways are being laid down among all the structures in the limbic system, which regulates emotion and motivation. Autistic children typically don't develop those pathways.

But with RDI, which uses cognitive exercises and activities to motivate the children to learn specific behaviors rather than social scripts, I think we can create the neurological traffic to establish those pathways. Mind you, we are not curing autism. But we are teaching emotional intelligence. If people with autism can learn emotional intelligence, anyone can.



## Get Motivated

**Richard Boyatzis** ([reb2@cwru.edu](mailto:reb2@cwru.edu)) is a professor and the chair of the department of organizational behavior at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management in Cleveland.

People can develop their emotional intelligence if they really want to. But many managers jump to the conclusion that their complement of emotional intelligence is predetermined. They think, "I could never be good at this, so why bother?" The central issue isn't a lack of ability to change; it's the lack of motivation to change.

Leadership development is not all that different from other areas in which people are trying to change their behaviors. Just look at the treatments for alcoholism, drug addiction, and weight loss: They all require the desire to change. More subtly, they all require a positive, rather than a negative, motivation. You have to want to change. If you think you'll lose your job because you're not adequately tuned in to your employees, you might become determinedly empathetic or compassionate for a time. But change driven by fear or avoidance probably isn't going to last. Change driven by hopes and aspirations, that's pursued because it's desired, will be more enduring.

There's no such thing as having too much emotional intelligence. But there is a danger in being preoccupied with, or overusing, one aspect of it. For example, if you overemphasize the emotional intelligence competencies of initiative or achievement, you'll always be changing things at your company. Nobody would know what you were going to do next, which would be quite destabilizing for the organization. If you overuse empathy, you might never fire anybody. If you overuse teamwork, you might never build diversity or listen to a lone voice. Balance is essential.



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