

# Carrier Management

## 20 Tips for Leaders: Developing Your Emotional Intelligence

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There are no shortcuts to becoming an emotionally intelligent leader. It's hard work.

For individuals who didn't start their insurance careers with EI competencies that they developed in school or in life, the process of building self-management skills or strengthening the neurocircuits that power empathy involves motivation, support, planning and practice, according to renowned EI researcher Daniel Goleman.

"You have to make an intentional effort," says Goleman, whose ideas about the elements of EI and development strategies are summarized in a separate article in this edition of *Carrier Management*.

For leaders who are getting acquainted with the basics and starting to make intentional efforts to improve, here are 20 tips we've gathered to reinforce them, gathered from the writings of Goleman, his followers and other researchers in the field.



- 1. Take the first step.** A great starting point for building up your emotional intelligence is to do a quick self-assessment. Ask yourself self-reflective questions such as:
  - Are you aware of your limitations, blind spots and areas of growth?
  - When faced with distressing emotions and conflict, are you able to quickly recover after you work through it?
  - Do you have the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference? (["If You Can Honestly Say 'Yes' to These 7 Questions, Your Emotional Intelligence Is Higher Than You Think,"](#) Inc.com, Aug. 31, 2019, Marcel Schwantes)
- 2. Evaluation is only the beginning.** Assessment tools can be helpful as a way for leaders to gain new perspectives on themselves, their values and their motivations, but they should be used as a catalyst for face-to-face feedback and discussion. Sit down and talk with a manager, peer or coach about how you can interpret and act upon the results of the assessment, asking open-ended questions tailored to your audience. (["4 Steps to Becoming a More Self-Aware Leader,"](#) Kellogg Insight blog, July 1, 2019, based on insights of Brenda Ellington Booth and Karen Cates)

3. **Get to know your team.** Understanding what motivates and inspires your employees and what is likely to cause them stress can help you build a strong and loyal team. Are your employees energized by just the thought of new responsibilities, or do they need to know how a task will impact the big picture? Does being the center of attention make them shine or cause nightmares? Communicate and get to know your staff and their styles, preferences and motivations. ([“Why having and utilizing empathy matters,”](#) SmartBrief, Jan. 21, 2019, by Joel Garfinkle)



4. **Watch your words.** When speaking with co-workers—or even in your personal life—there are certain things you simply shouldn't say if you want to communicate effectively. Avoid outbursts and words that cast blame, are dismissive, relinquish responsibility or imply lack of interest. Some examples: “It's your fault”; “I don't care”; “That's your problem.” ([“9 Things Emotionally Intelligent People Never Say,”](#) Inc.com, July 30, 2019, by Scott Mautz)
5. **Don't be afraid to give negative feedback.** It's important to get to know your employees and to have an understanding of their lives outside the office, but being too empathetic may actually hinder your ability to lead. If an employee's non-work life is beginning to affect the bottom line, then it's time to provide critical feedback to get them back on track. ([“The Art of Effective Feedback,”](#) Korn Ferry Institute, March 5, 2019, by Daniel Goleman)
6. **Communication is critical.** When planning an organizational change, talk to your team to uncover their feelings about the company's strategy and listen to any questions or concerns they may have. Remember that *how* information is communicated to employees matters more than *what* information is communicated. Tell people what to expect, sharing as much information as possible. ([“The Secret to Leading Organizational Change Is Empathy,”](#) Harvard Business Review, Dec. 20, 2018, by Patti Sanchez)
7. **Think about warmth strategically.** Cultivating warmth is about being purposeful, setting aside the time and thinking carefully about how to build relationships with people rather than simply trusting that your natural warmth will win them over. ([“Why Warmth Is the Underappreciated Skill Leaders Need,”](#) Kellogg Insight blog, April 10, 2017, based on insights of Loran Nordgren)
8. **One breath. Then two.** Executives who are aware of emotional states—theirs and others—and who are fully present in the moment can communicate more fully to people. Transition times between meetings offer them an opportunity to pause, breathe, train their attention on the present moment, and settle into stillness for five or 10 minutes. ([“Embracing Mindfulness: Conquering Cognitive Overload in a Hyper-Digital World,”](#) Carrier Management, Sept. 1, 2017)
9. **Ask what, not why.** To increase productive self-insight and decrease unproductive rumination, ask yourself “what” questions. Don't ask, “Why do I feel so terrible?” Instead ask, “What are the situations that make me feel terrible, and what do they have in common?” ([“What Self-Awareness Really Is \(and How to Cultivate It,”](#) Harvard Business Review, Jan. 4, 2018, by Tasha Eurich)
10. **Celebrate the success of others.** Don't compete with your team for recognition and credit for a job well done; encourage them to continually do better. Remember that your success as a leader will be judged on the accomplishments of the people you lead. Invest in them and work to build future leaders, offering advice and inspiration whenever and wherever it is needed. ([“It's Not About You,”](#) Lead Today blog, Feb. 15, 2019, by Steve Keating)
11. **Stop and listen.** Being listened to has a profound impact on emotional well-being, self-confidence and the development of counter-empathy (the ability to show compassion for others in return for theirs for you). Whether an employee is giving a weekly status report or a loved one is sharing news of their day, make the choice to disconnect from your inner-me and engage in empathy by making eye contact and truly listening. ([“Wonder How Emotionally Intelligent You Are? This 1 Airplane Behavior Is a Telltale Sign,”](#) Inc.com, Feb. 15, 2019, by Scott Mautz)
12. **Become a True North Leader.** Building authentic relationships with your co-workers (and customers) requires truth, transparency and trust—the three T's of True North Leaders. Tell the whole story, not just the good parts.



Don't hoard information; people need to know what's going on if they're going to help you solve the problem. Create trust by being fully present and willing to address the most difficult issues. ("[Truth, Transparency & Trust: The 3 T's of True North Leaders](#)," LinkedIn, July 8, 2019, Bill George)

13. **Find well-being through purpose.** Having a sense of purpose and pursuing meaningful goals can help you make the transition from moments of happiness to true satisfaction and well-being. In the workplace, that means creating an organization where decisions are made based on values, people are the top priority and leadership works to build a culture of acceptance. ("[A Missing Link Between Work and Well-Being](#)," Korn Ferry Institute, April 15, 2019, Daniel Goleman)
14. **Own your mistakes.** Leader or not, being human means making mistakes. If you made the decision, initiated the change, approved the policy, supervised the people or led the product campaign, then you are responsible for the outcome. Admit your mistake, explain what happened, and then look to the future by sharing your plan to correct or improve the situation. ("[Here's How Real Leaders Own Their Mistakes](#)," TLNT, July 22, 2019 Dianna Booher)
15. **Take a moment for reflection.** Reflex responses are fine for making routine decisions, but with increased customer expectations and unexpected competition in the marketplace, leadership today often requires more reflective responses. Pause and take a breath before acting. Bring a curious mind, even to routine situations. Ask "what if" questions to better understand opportunities. Take some time to think before offering answers or direction. ("[Are you a reflective or reflexive leader?](#)" SmartBrief, Feb. 14, 2019, Julie Winkle Giulioni)
16. **A one-to-one meeting with a twist.** Rather than meeting with employees only when it's time to problem-solve or critique, try sitting down with some regular questions and just getting to know your employees, to empathize and learn. Being heard like this—without worry of being fixed or managed—may allow your employees to gain comfort and feel able to bring up difficult situations before they become huge problems. ("[This CEO Has a Near-100 Percent Employee Retention Rate. Here's the Fascinating Reason Why](#)," Inc.com, March 14, 2019, Melanie Curtin)
17. **Be brave enough to ask for help.** Don't let fear of looking weak keep you from seeking assistance when needed. When a leader has the courage to ask for help, it creates a ripple effect, giving others permission to do the same and creating a culture of openness and collaboration. ("[The Bravest Leaders Use This Powerful Four-Letter Word More Than You Think](#)," Forbes.com, July 30, 2019, Amy Blaschka)
18. **Accept responsibility.** When faced with an uncomfortable situation, many of us react defensively, blaming others, feigning confusion or avoiding the issue. Instead, you need to accept that you are part of the problem. If your team seems dysfunctional, it's time to step back and look at your own behaviors and reactions. How are your words and actions impacting the behavior of your teammates? ("[To Improve Your Team, First Work on Yourself](#)," Harvard Business Review, Jan. 29, 2019, Jennifer Porter)
19. **Remember to be human in a crisis.** When disaster strikes, it's important to communicate clearly and to show empathy and compassion. Too many leaders take the cautious route, following the advice of their legal or financial departments, which often leaves them looking uncaring or disconnected. And that can have a negative impact on the company's reputation. ("[How leaders can bridge the empathy gap in a crisis](#)," Oct. 2, 2019, Eric J. McNulty)
20. **Mistrust shouldn't be your default.** A little skepticism is healthy, but if your default is to automatically mistrust other people, it can cause enormous damage to your relationships and credibility. An attitude of mistrust can cause you to tune out information you need to hear, misread the situation and take the wrong actions in response. ("[People are more trustworthy than you think](#)," strategy + business, Sept. 5, 2019, Elizabeth Doty)

