

## Book Review

### ***Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence***

by Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, Annie McKee

Harvard Business School Press, 2002

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When I began reading this latest effort by Daniel Goleman et al., I was a bit skeptical. Seems like an increasing number of what I call "Kumbaya" books have come onto the market lately -- books promoting the touchy, feely side of leadership. Fortunately, I was pleasantly surprised: This work offers much more than that. I found myself relating to many of the real world situations that are used as context for Goleman's claims. This reality-based context made the information much more meaningful and allowed me to see the practical side as well as the theoretical.

The basic claim Goleman makes in *Primal Leadership* is that a leader's behaviors are just as important, or even more so, than other attributes leaders must possess, such as vision, intelligence, and so on.

In the first part of this book, Goleman and his co-authors help us assess who we are as leaders, what styles we use, and how people perceive us. They identify four behavioral domains important for leadership:

- **Self Awareness.** This includes the ability to read our own emotions and recognize their impact on others, know our own limits and strengths, and have a good sense of our capabilities.
- **Self Management.** This domain encompasses having emotional self control, being honest, adaptable, and driven to improve performance and meet standards of excellence, and possessing initiative and optimism.
- **Social Awareness.** Leadership requires empathy and sensitivity to others' emotions, taking interest in others, organizational and political awareness, and a willingness to serve the needs of both customers and employees.
- **Relationship Management.** Success in this domain rests on our ability to guide and motivate others, to influence people and help them develop, and to serve as a catalyst for change, manage

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conflict, and forge the bonds required for effective teamwork and collaboration.

The authors claim that very few people are excellent in all four domains (How many can you think of?), but successful leaders are very competent in at least two or three.

The authors also theorize that different situations require different types of leadership. This seems like common sense, but in my experience, the dynamic range of most managers is rather limited. Therefore, I thought the chapters that discuss various leadership styles (Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetter, Commanding) were quite accurate. The examples are good, too; The authors present the pros and cons of each style within the context of an actual business situation, explaining that the style should map to the situation. You wouldn't want a democratic leader in a battle situation (commanding style would be preferable here), for example, and you wouldn't want a pacesetter style in an academic environment (affiliative or coaching styles would be top choices in this situation).

## **Emotional Intelligence versus Strategic Thinking**

Another important point the authors make in this book is that it is critical to put people before strategy. Here I thought they were a little off. Although I agree that you should never discount the importance of people, I believe that you should consider them in parallel with strategy. Why? Because I strongly feel that leaders need a balance between emotional intelligence (the personal, behavioral side of leadership) and what I call functional intelligence (the vision, knowing the market, decision making, judgment, etc.) in order to do their job effectively. If we spent all our time building teams and rallying the troops but ignoring business strategy, then how would we know in which direction we were going? And what type of people we needed to get there?

In fact, as I read farther into the book, I got the feeling that the perspective was getting progressively more academic and psychological and less pragmatic. I would also like to have seen more data to support several claims the authors make. For example, when they say that a new manager in a failing company turned the organization around and became successful (there are many examples like this in the book), it would have been helpful if they had elaborated on a few specific key actions that contributed to the person's success. Instead, the reader must be content with referring back to their theories about success and drawing whatever conclusions one can from the scanty description of the situation.

These frustrations notwithstanding, I highly recommend this book to everyone in any management role, especially in the technical field. All too often, we discount the importance of applying emotional intelligence in our interactions, which can certainly affect a team's willingness to get behind a leader. Like Goleman, I've always believed that without the motivation and commitment of the entire team, successes are short-lived and rarely sweet. But I also believe that, to succeed, leaders need more than the traits discussed in this book; they must also know and be able to apply the

business fundamentals and practical mechanics required to thrive in a real work environment.

**-[Sid Fuchs](#)**

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