

# **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

## **Effective Leadership Through Emotional Maturity**

By Linda Hyatt, Ph. D., Blaine Hyatt, Me. D, James C. Hyatt, Ph. D. Candidate

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### **Effective Leadership Through Emotional Maturity**

Linda L. Hyatt and C. Blaine Hyatt

Fort Hays State University

James C. Hyatt

Walden University-PhD Candidate

#### **Abstract**

This article addresses successful leadership, emotional intelligence, and emotional maturity and their impact on society. To merely hold the position of a leader does not make one a leader. Success is largely an individualistic interpretation of personal increase or satisfaction, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. One's perception of success is influenced by the social contexts around the individual. A successful leader must possess certain characteristics and have the ability to transform those characteristics into action. A person may understand, believe, and accept proper leadership techniques; however, if one is not able to implement those techniques the leadership would be flawed and the proper leadership model would break down under adverse conditions. Two basic factors contribute to one's ability or inability to implement proper leadership techniques: first, emotional intelligence, the cognitive understanding and acceptance of basic leadership principles, and second, the ability to implement those principles, emotional maturity. An individual may possess one without the other yet their ability to be a successful leader will be inhibited.

#### **Introduction**

What makes a leader successful? This question has been asked throughout the ages; before one attempt to understand what makes a leader successful, one must first have a full comprehension of what constitutes success and what constitutes a leader. To merely hold the position of a leader does not make one a leader. Success is largely an individualistic interpretation of personal increase or satisfaction, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. One's perception of success is influenced by the social contexts around the individual. A successful leader must possess certain characteristics and have the ability to transform those characteristics into action. A person may understand, believe, and accept proper leadership techniques; however, if one is not able to implement those techniques the leadership would be flawed and the proper leadership model would break down under adverse conditions. Two basic factors contribute to one's ability or inability to implement proper leadership techniques: first, emotional intelligence, the cognitive understanding and acceptance of basic leadership principles, and second, the ability to implement those principles, emotional maturity. An individual may possess one without the other yet their ability to be a successful leader will be inhibited.

#### **Successful Leadership**

Success is often defined by society in terms of social position, income, academic achievement, honors, relationships, etc. However, success is also individualistic and influenced by one's sociocultural and socioeconomic status. Individuals achieving success is dependent upon them capitalizing on strengths and overcoming or correcting, in some way, their weaknesses. Individuals measure success based upon their established goals and ideals. Success is achieved through an individual's ability to meet those goals and ideals. In this way, success can be viewed individually and socially. An individual may be socially successful and yet fall short of individual success, and others may view themselves as individually successful while society may not view them as successful. For the purposes of this examination of successful leadership, this article will primarily focus on the social perceptions of successful leadership skills.

Leadership is often viewed by society as a position held by an individual, for instance an administrator, dean, CEO, executive, manager, and one would assume that those filling such positions would possess leadership skills. However, this is a faulty perception of what a leader is. Simply establishing a position and title and being given the responsibilities of a leader does not make one a leader. It is true that those in leadership positions should possess the skills of a leader, but the skills needed for successful leadership are not automatic or guaranteed by holding a certain position. Within any organization, there are those who hold the official position of leadership and have the authority by right of position to lead. However, because of their lack of leadership characteristics, either understanding (i.e., they simply do not know and possess sufficient knowledge of proper leadership skills) or if they possess knowledge and leadership skills they may lack the ability to effectively implement them.

When this occurs, the overall effectiveness of the organization will be flawed or break down and the organization will fail to function as effectively as it should and may often create a negative environment. In such cases, that individual may continue to hold the position of leadership. However, in reality, these individuals may not be the actual leaders, as there may be individuals within the rank and file of the organization who do not hold the position, yet due to the leadership skills they possess, they become the leader and wield greater influence with their peers than do those in official leadership positions. Successful leadership is not the result of simply obtaining a position, but rather possessing the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership skills along with the personal ability to effectively implement those skills.

For organizations to succeed in today's global society, it is necessary that they maintain a strategic advantage. Strategic advantage applies to all organizations whether they are a worldwide organization, family based business, university, a school district, a school within the district, etc.; every organization needs to be aware of and work toward gaining a strategic advantage. To obtain and maintain a strategic advantage, organizations must motivate and encourage their employees (including members, volunteers, etc.) to seek to implement change. Leadership plays an integral part in organizational change, having a great impact on the employees' perceptions of change. By nature, all human beings resist change. This nature is carried into the workplace as employees, in general, will also resist change. In order for leaders to be successful, they must be able to implement a high level of leadership skills which lead to effective interpersonal relationships with the employees. This creates a plastic environment wherein employees feel safe and are willing to risk the changes requested. As a symphony requires a conductor to direct its various sections and ensure that each section plays its part, change within an organization requires a leader to direct and assist in the transition. Change that occurs as a random event may not produce positive outcomes.

### **Two factors influencing leadership skills**

Successful leaders are often perceived as having superior intellect. However, it is difficult to account for individuals (e.g., former president George Bush) who are perceived as successful leaders, but did not have exceptionally high scores on their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SATs). Incidents such as this make it difficult to use conventional perceptions of intelligence (i.e., I.Q.) to predict success as a leader. Intelligence is perceived as a generalized ability to adapt to one's environment. The intelligence aspect of a successful leader needs to be understood in terms of one's ability to capitalize on one's strengths and correct or compensate for weaknesses (Sternberg 2003). Certain leadership skills influence an organization's success in implementing change in a positive manner. In today's fast paced society, organizations must maintain a healthy level of constant change in order to stay competitive. However, many organizations fail to successfully implement positive change programs.

Seventy percent of change programs fail because of lack of strategy and vision, lack of communication and trust, lack of top management commitment, lack of resources, lack of change management skills, resistance to change etc. Research dealing with organizational change has mainly focused on organizational factors neglecting the person-oriented issues. (Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou 2004, 88)

Two particular factors influence one's leadership skills: emotional intelligence (EI) and, more particularly, emotional maturity (EM). The emotional aspect of effective leadership has received a great deal of attention over the past few decades. As traditional methods (i.e., IQ and traditional views of intelligence) of gauging potential for success were found to be inadequate, researchers began studying emotional intelligence. "Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions; to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to

promote emotional and intellectual growth” (emotional what?). Qualities of EI include: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman 1998). Goleman’s research indicates that in the hierarchy of skills and abilities, traditional views of intelligence constitute a stepping stone, upon which one must build with emotional intelligence in order to be truly successful. Studies have shown that individuals with high levels of EI were more effective in performing their tasks. “For 515 senior executives analyzed by the search firm Egon Zehnder International, those who were primarily strong in emotional intelligence were more likely to succeed than those who were strongest in either relevant previous experience or IQ. In other words, emotional intelligence was a better predictor of success than either relevant previous experience or high IQ. . . .The study included executives in Latin America, Germany, and Japan, and the results were almost identical in all three cultures” (Cherniss and Goleman [1998](#)).

EI is an integral component in successful leadership, yet, in and of itself, it is incomplete. In a complete view of a successful leader one must address EM. As with any words, the words emotional and maturity are ambiguous having no meaning except the meaning which individuals attach to them. Theorists have expressed interest in EM and have sought to define it; however, these definitions are insufficient and simply define components of EI. According to Hyatt, Hyatt, and Hyatt (2007), EI is like water behind a dam, having potential energy. EI is knowledge and understanding which has little or no value until it is properly released and utilized, whereas EM is the willingness and ability to utilize and apply the knowledge and understanding in an appropriate and productive way. One’s emotional facets include the knowledge, ability, and the desire. EI constitutes the knowledge, while EM constitutes the ability and desire or willingness to act upon one’s knowledge. The definition of EM, according to Hyatt, Hyatt, and Hyatt is, “The understanding and acceptance of all of one’s normal feelings and emotions and the appropriate response to those emotions in all circumstances. The understanding of one’s own paradigm and the awareness that this may not be totally accurate or complete. The willingness to expand and enlarge one’s paradigm with the acquisition of new information while recognizing and accepting differences in others as assets to be valued.”

The ability of leaders to implement successful leadership skills is a result of their behavioral response to a situation. Behavior consists of feelings, actions, and thoughts, which is in direct correlation to one’s degree of EM. Therefore, EM is perhaps the most important attribute which an individual can possess to ensure success. One’s behavioral response to any situation is a product of one’s mental script. Our mental script, whether at a conscious or subconscious level is the way we view ourselves, others, our relationship to others and our environment, and all that is around us. This script has been developed over our life as life experiences have played out from birth. Just as a blank tape accepts the information that is available and records that information, our mind accepts and records information from our environment, according to our perception, and over the years this develops into our mental script which becomes responsible for our behavior. The goal of developing EM is to re-write the mental script in a way which will produce positive, productive behaviors.

The obstacles, according to Hyatt, Hyatt, and Hyatt (2007), which interfere with rewriting our mental script and heightening our degree of EM have been identified as: trashcans, bricks, negative self-validation behaviors, and negative habit patterns. Trashcans and bricks refer to the baggage we carry with us from past experiences and the emotions associated with them, whether conscious or subconscious, that interfere with the ability to acquire and utilize new information, make nonbiased and unemotional interpretations of that information, and apply it appropriately in one’s present life. Trashcans refer more specifically to our response to things that have occurred in our life which, at the time it occurred, the response was appropriate, but is no longer necessary. Bricks, on the other hand, refer to ongoing issues in our lives which we do not deal with appropriately and, therefore, they continue to affect our present behavior responses. Negative self-validation behaviors refer to feeling justified in the way we behave. We feel justified, that we have a right to feel, act, or think in the way we do. Therefore, because we have a right we perpetuate the behavior by continually finding ways to justify it. This continues to be entrenched in the mental script, impeding our self-objectivity in self-evaluation.

Everyone has patterns of behavior which are nothing more or less than habits which have been developed and continued over a process of time. Although some of these patterns may be positive, other patterns are negative and lead to inappropriate behavioral responses. These habits are developed in many ways as we progress through life. Through observation we see others behaving in a certain way in a given circumstance and we begin to parrot their behavior. Some habits are picked up by accident; we simply start behaving in a certain way. Without logical reason or emotional basis, we simply pick up certain behaviors which become habitual. Over time, these habits become more deeply embedded in our behavioral responses and inhibit our ability to respond in an appropriate manner.

In order to be successful, leaders must have a high degree of EM. Most leaders may know what needs to be done and how they should interact with those around them. However, the reason they do not execute this knowledge is lack of EM. One of the authors worked with a school administrator who, after attending a summer seminar, had the knowledge, the understanding, and the desire to implement positive leadership strategies in order to improve the atmosphere, the success, and interactions in the school. At the beginning of the school year, he announced his intention and desire to implement these positive changes in the school. He was successful at moving forward with making these positive changes for about two weeks. However, in order to do so, it was necessary for him to stay consciously focused, as his degree of EM was not sufficient to implement these changes automatically. Under stress and constant pressures, he was not able to consciously stay focused and reverted back to his previous management styles. Despite having the EI (i.e., the knowledge, understanding, and even the desire) he did not have the EM (i.e., the ability) to see the changes through.

This school administrator was not able to rewrite his mental script and change the way his subconscious mind interpreted and perceived his experiences. The subconscious mind is the place our self-concept (e.g., our beliefs about ourselves, others, and our environment) is stored. The information stored is based upon our interpretation of our experiences. Our interpretation is tinted by our trashcans, bricks, negative self-validation behaviors, and negative habit patterns. It becomes the mental script from which we operate. This mental script influences and dictates the way we think, feel, and act on a conscious level. Mental script equals behavior and behavior consists of feelings, actions, and thoughts. If behavior is to be changed, EM must be developed. In order for EM to develop, the mental script must be rewritten. The treatment of any problem is based on our explanation of the problem. The wrong explanation equals the wrong treatment. A faulty mental script equals the wrong explanation and, consequently, the wrong treatment. A faulty mental script equates to lack of EM, which affects all aspects of life.

The development of EM has far reaching effects. As leaders improve their degree of EM, it has a two-fold effect on society. First, as leaders model a high degree of EM, they will assist those working around them in improving their degree of EM. This impact on individuals will ripple out into the lives of those individuals. As individuals improve their lives through the development of EM, they will have a positive impact on the society around them. Second, leaders with a high degree of EM will be more capable of implementing positive organizational change, rippling up through organizational change and positively effecting social change.

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