

**Primal Leadership:**

**Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence**

Daniel Goldman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee  
(Harvard Business School Press, 2002)

Daniel Goldman's work on Emotional Intelligence has shown that "being smart" is more than just IQ (intellectual capacity and skills). His latest book *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* is useful for our thinking about regional stewardship. He and his colleagues make the point that a leader's emotions are contagious.

Great leaders move us. They ignite passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision and powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions

The authors make the case that when leaders drive emotions positively, they bring out everyone's best. He calls this resonance. When they drive emotions negatively, leaders spawn dissonance. Whether an organization withers or flourishes depends to a remarkable extent on the leaders' effectiveness in this primal emotional dimension.

He goes on to make the case that making primal leadership work to everyone's advantage lies in the leadership competencies of emotional intelligence: how leaders handle themselves and their relationships.

Recent studies of the brain reveal the neurological mechanisms for primal leadership and make clear why emotional intelligence abilities are so crucial.

The reason a leader's manner—not just what he does, but how he does it—matters so much lies in the design of the human brain: what scientist have begun to call the open-loop nature of the limbic system, our emotional centers. .. The open loop design of the limbic system means that other people change our very physiology and so our emotions

How well leaders manage their moods and affect everyone else's moods become not just a private matter but a factor in how well an organization will do.

Goldman then provides some key aspects of leadership:

### Key Emotional Domains for Resonant Leadership

- Personal Competence
- Self-Awareness
- Self-management
- Social Competence
- Social awareness
- Relationship management

### Leadership Styles

- Visionary
- Coaching
- Affiliative
- Democratic
- Pacesetter
- Commanding

One of the most interesting parts of the book is the section on “Making Leaders” where he makes the case that leaders are made not born. But learning does not often take place in formal leadership development programs but rather through real world practice. He points to research that indicates that leadership development and training programs have limited impact with about a 10% improvement measured in three months, a year and half after training.

Emotional intelligence involves circuitry that runs between the brain’s executive centers in the prefrontal lobes and the brain’s limbic areas, which govern feeling, impulses and drives. Skills based in the limbic areas, research shows, are best learned through motivation, extended practice, and feedback.

Most training programs target the neocortex, which governs analytic and technical ability. Thus learning is limited... Reeducating the emotional brain for leadership learning requires a different model from what works for the thinking brain: It needs lots of practice and repetition.

The authors outlined *a new model of leadership learning* :

The lessons people get in leadership start very early in life from observing teachers, coaches, mentors—anyone who has been in a role of leaders in their lives... Then as they begin to step into their first leadership roles in clubs, teams, student government or as leaders in their peer groups, they put those models into

practice. In their jobs, they encounter new leaders and try out new leadership behaviors, adding on to that early initial scaffolding that they had built.

Virtually none of these lessons involve *explicit* instruction in the elements of leadership—they arise natural in the course of life.... Cognitive scientists call such strengthening of habit implicit learning, as opposed to the explicit variety provided in school courses.

They conclude that “for the most part, the brain masters the competencies of leadership—everything from self-confidence and emotional self-management to empathy and persuasion—through implicit learning.”

He identifies ways to speed up the implicit learning process including the power of mentors. He cites research by the Center for Creative Leadership on the role of mentoring in shaping a leader’s abilities. Working with a mentor who knows what you are trying to do and with whom you share your learning agenda, converts the mentor into a coach.

Emotionally intelligent leaders who use resonance-building leadership styles and create norms of healthy, effective working relationships will release a powerful force: the collective energy of the organization to pursue any group strategy. These kinds of leaders build with positives: they craft a vision with heartfelt passion, they foster an inspiring mission that is deeply woven into the organizational fabric and they know how to give people a sense that their work is meaningful. In short they lead with their emotions and are contagious.