

# A Tale of Two Leaders: The Case for Emotional Intelligence

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([https://pj.news.chass.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/02/Marie-Peeler-Head-Shot\\_revised.jpg](https://pj.news.chass.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/02/Marie-Peeler-Head-Shot_revised.jpg)) *Special to the Philanthropy Journal*

By Marie Peeler

Suppose you are a potential donor or you represent a foundation. You have two possible organizations to invest in but can only fund one. Both have compelling missions and both have programs that fall within your foundation's areas of focus. The organizations are of a similar size and age and both organizations' Executive Directors have similar tenure. The organizations are similar in most ways. But you must choose. (Sounding familiar?)

([https://pj.news.chass.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/02/Peeler-Associates-Logo\\_revised.png](https://pj.news.chass.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/02/Peeler-Associates-Logo_revised.png)) As you complete your due diligence and talk to people in the community that are familiar with both organizations you start to confirm your suspicions. One organization is run by a leader that is respected for her dedication and hard work. She is described as a bit emotional, prone to expressing her anger or disappointment with board members and staff in ways that sometimes make people uncomfortable. She doesn't always seem to understand how others feel about key issues or her own actions. People say that she is a nice person but can be a bit negative and often seems stressed out. No one seems to hold any of these traits against her. After all, times are tough and her job *is* quite challenging.

Many of the people that you talk to also know the leader of the other organization, who also has a challenging job. People light up when they talk about her. They describe her as confident and direct in communicating what she is feeling and what she needs and, at the same time, sensitive to the feelings of others and good at building relationships. She tends to be an optimistic person as well as a dogged problem solver. She is realistic about challenges, opportunities, and her own abilities. People like that she is patient and calm, even when provoked or under stress.

All other things being equal, which organization would you choose?

The differences between the two leaders can be summed up by two words: Emotional Intelligence. We call it a "soft skill" and it can be hard to define, but we know it when we see it.

## **Emotional Intelligence defined.**

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and manage our moods and emotions, along with the ability to recognize and interpret others' emotions and perceptions, and manage interpersonal relationships. It involves such things as self-regard, confidence, emotional expression, stress tolerance, flexibility, assertiveness, independence, empathy, problem-solving, impulse control, flexibility, and optimism.

## **The importance of Emotional Intelligence.**

In the example above, we know instinctively that the second leader, the emotionally intelligent one, is more likely to garner cooperation from others, lead with agility, and maintain high performance through tough times. We sense that, ultimately, her organization will obtain better outcomes, achieve greater sustainability in the long-term, and offer a better investment opportunity.

For a so-called *soft* skill, Emotional Intelligence, also known as EI, produces *hard* results.

## **Emotional Intelligence can and should be developed.**

Emotional Intelligence can be measured, using specially designed assessments. It can also be developed in much the same way as any other leadership skill. Building emotionally intelligent leaders is simply another facet of capacity-building.

It's imperative that we start by having the conversation in and with organizations. Why is EI important? What difference does it make? What greater good can be accomplished by emotionally intelligent leaders? How does emotional intelligence lead to greater job satisfaction?

It is not instinctive for nonprofit leaders to focus on themselves. The very idea of talking about their own leadership development may seem greedy or inappropriate in a world where focusing on others is a core principal. Helping leaders to see the greater difference that they can make by developing their own emotional intelligence is key.

### Provide support for the measurement and development of EI.

Emotional intelligence, to a large degree, is developed in the same way as any other skill. Learning style plays a role as organizations seek the best ways to develop the emotional intelligence of their leaders. Reading books, taking classes, and working with a coach are all valid ways of beginning to develop emotional intelligence. Ultimately, like any other skill, practice and feedback are critical.

As donors and foundations strive to put their dollars to work in innovative and sustainable organizations where they can have the greatest impact, organizations that are conscientiously striving to develop the emotional intelligence of their leaders represent a wise investment.

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