

Leading Resonant Teams by Daniel Goleman

Leader to Leader, No. 25 Summer 2002

AS an investigator, writer, and teacher, Daniel Goleman has been at the forefront of original thinking on individual and organizational performance for well over a decade. His best-selling books, *Emotional Intelligence* and *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, sparked an explosion of interest and research on how emotions affect performance. His latest book, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, with coauthors Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, brings together recent work in psychology, neuroanatomy, group behavior, and organizational performance to present powerful new insights on leadership.

Leader to Leader was able to sit down with Dan recently to discuss how leaders can improve team performance. Along the way, Dan introduced us to a term we had never encountered before, the "resonant team."

Leader to Leader: Teams are the vehicle of choice in today's organizations. Much research has demonstrated the superiority of group decision making over that of even the ablest individual in the group. But there is one obvious exception to this rule: when a team is conflicted or dispirited, decision making takes a dramatic turn for the worse. Why are emotions so important on teams?

Daniel Goleman: Every group -- every team -- has a mood. Just think about the last time you got to a team meeting late. You could probably sense the emotional temperature in the room immediately. Teams are upbeat or downbeat, optimistic or pessimistic, motivated or demotivated, alienated or involved -- all of that. All of those dimensions describe emotional realities. And the ability of a team to rise to the level of star performance is determined by how harmonious the team is, how well people get along, and so on. To the extent that the people on the team feel that "nobody cares about me," or they are really mad at that person over there, or they can't stand the team leader, they will not contribute their best. Then they won't work well with other people; they won't be seamless in their efforts. And the actual performance of the team will be lowered directly.

L2L: But aren't people, especially those in management, expected to leave their emotions at the door when they come to work?

DG: People do not leave their emotions at home when they go to work. We are always feeling something. And despite the fact that



Thought
Leaders
Forum:
[Daniel
Goleman](#)

Daniel Goleman is a psychologist, best-selling author, and award-winning journalist. He is co-chairman of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. For many years he reported on the behavioral sciences for the New York Times. (6/2002)

[More on Daniel Goleman](#)

Emotions are really more powerful than intellect.

many organizational cultures place a high value on intelligence devoid of emotion, our emotions are really more powerful than our intellect. Our emotions alert us to dangers. They are crucial to our survival, and evolution has wired the human brain so that emotions command attention. The brain is designed so that distressing emotions disable rational thought.

Research clearly shows that when people are angry, anxious, alienated, or depressed, their work suffers. You can't think as clearly; you can't take in information as fully, understand it as deeply, and respond as adaptively when you're upset. And the reason is that upsetting emotions are meant to be signals to pay attention to what's distressing and to do something about that. So, when you are preoccupied, the net result is that your ability to effectively process information suffers. And when this happens in a team setting, it is even more dangerous and dysfunctional.

L2L: Why is that?

DG: Emotions are contagious. We've all seen it: If someone comes into a meeting upset or angry, and that emotion is not dealt with, it can quickly spread to everyone in the group. More positively, a person with a good sense of humor can quickly get a whole roomful of people laughing. Why? The emotional system of the brain -- unlike any other biological system in the body -- is designed to be regulated not just internally but externally, in our relationships with other people. The circulatory system is a closed loop. But emotions are an open loop system. In other words, our brain is designed so that other people can help us manage our emotions better.

Emotions are contagious.

L2L: So, on a team, the leadership task is to help everyone manage their emotions?

DG: At work, we turn to the leader to help us make sense of something that's confusing or disturbing, or to give us direction, to inspire us, to motivate us. The leader's fundamental task is an emotional task.

And, if a leader thinks -- as too many do, I'm afraid -- "This isn't really part of my task; it doesn't matter how I act, just so long as people understand what I want," then that undermines the ability to lead. The leader in a group, more than anyone else, determines the consensual emotions, the shared emotions. So it is very important that the leader pay attention to the emotional reality of a team and take care of it.

L2L: How does a leader help the team do this and become more emotionally intelligent?

DG: There are four aspects of emotional intelligence: emotional self-awareness, emotional self-management, awareness of others' emotions -- or empathy -- and managing relationships with others. The leader needs to help the team become adept in each of these aspects of emotional intelligence. And to do this, the leader has to establish a set of ground rules for the way we work together, both by example in her own behavior

and by commenting on the behavior of others and helping people do better. In other words, the leader needs to help the team become more self-aware, which is the core aspect of emotional intelligence. "Gee, we noticed that something's up with Jack; we better go talk to him." You don't ignore the fact that someone's really having a bad time or a down time, but you do something to bring him or her back into the loop. You make the emotional reality discussable. That self-awareness is a prerequisite for the team's ability to manage its own emotions, to deal with issues rather than burying them.

L2L: What else can the leader do, beyond helping the team develop self-awareness?

DG: A leader can establish positive norms: that the team, as a whole, has empathy, both internally -- we pay attention to each other -- and externally -- we also pay attention as a collective to how the rest of the organization or the milieu we operate in is regarding us; that we have political awareness as a group; that we know how to get what we need from the organization to do our best. And a leader can set the norm that the team needs to manage its collective relationships with the rest of an organization. Smart teams, high-performing teams, know how to access the resources in a larger organization. And that means that they are aware that they, as a team, have relationships -- not individually but as a team. Some teams can be oblivious to that fact; all they see is the universe within the team, not how the team relates beyond to the larger web in the organization.

When all four of these aspects of emotional intelligence are well developed, the team resonates.

L2L: Please explain what you mean by that.

DG: Let's look at how an individual leader can be resonant first, and then at teams. First of all, if you are a resonant leader, you tune in to your own values, priorities, sense of meaning, and goals -- and you lead authentically from those, and you do it in a way that you tune in to other people's sense of values, priority, meaning, and goals. When you tune in to others, that helps them tune in to you. In other words, you create a climate where you can articulate a shared mission that moves people.

The opposite of resonance is dissonance. Dissonant leaders don't care how people feel. They just want to get the job done, no matter what. They pressure people; they create fear as a motivator -- which is itself a destructive emotion -- and they do things that make people angry, and they act as though it didn't matter. But it matters greatly. And the data is very strong in showing that, everything else being equal, if you take two leaders, one resonant and one dissonant, the resonant leader will always do better than the dissonant one.

L2L: And resonance on the team?

DG: On a team, resonance releases energy in people, and it increases the amount of energy available to the team, which, in turn, puts people in a state where they can work at their best. The dictionary defines resonance as the propagation of sound "by synchronous

vibration." On a resonant team, the members vibrate together, so to speak, with positive emotional energy. Vanessa Druskat at Case Western University has done wonderful research on the emotional intelligence of teams. Her research shows that when a team as a whole shows emotional intelligence -- that is, resonates -- that predicts that it will be a top-performing team, no matter what its performance criterion might be.

L2L: In *Primal Leadership*, you discuss six different leadership styles, and their impact on a group in terms of creating resonance or dissonance.

DG: These six styles have been talked about for many years. The styles are visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding. [\[See box.\]](#) What we have added is data from the Hay Group that shows how each of the styles impacts the team climate, the emotions of the people who work with that leader.

L2L: Let's talk about how each style works in a team setting. Take the visionary style first.

DG: A visionary leader articulates a shared vision and gives clear direction and really helps people move toward a shared hope or dream. This is the classic model of leadership. It creates an immensely positive impact on the team's emotional climate. For example, a visionary leader clearly articulates where the team is going but not how it will get there. This sets people free to innovate, experiment, and take calculated risks. To be effective using this style, a leader needs a well-developed sense of empathy. You have to be able to read people, to sense what they are feeling and if they resonate with the picture you are painting. You can't inspire people without understanding their perspectives, their hopes and dreams.

L2L: The coaching style must look very different.

DG: The coaching style is the least-used tool in the leader's toolkit, we find, probably because it doesn't look like leadership. The coaching style involves talking to someone off line, outside the team setting. You have a one-on-one conversation, not about your shared task, not about the job but about the person. Who are you? I'd like to get to know you; I'd like to understand you. What do you want in your life? What's your life like? What do you want for your career? What do you want from your job? How can I help you get what you want, go where you want to go?

This conversation opens up an ongoing dialogue that lets the leader articulate the task in ways that make sense to that person, in terms of where they want to go, or to find a stretch task for that person, to do them the favor of giving them a challenge that leads them in the direction where they want to be moving anyway. That creates immense loyalty and immense commitment to the leader and the team. Unfortunately, many managers are inept at using the coaching style. Too often, they think they're coaching when they are actually micromanaging. Good coaches ask themselves, is this about my issue or theirs?

Too often people think they're coaching when they're actually micromanaging.

L2L: Tell me about the affiliative style.

DG: The affiliative style creates harmony in the group by getting people to connect with each other. Affiliative leaders create settings in which people can spend time together, get to know each other, and then bond together. They focus on people and their feelings more than on tasks and goals and use praise lavishly. The affiliative style builds emotional capital among the team, so that the group can work together more harmoniously, even under pressure, and team members are also more likely to be there for you as a leader when you really need them. The downside to this style is that its focus on praise and making people feel good can allow conflicts to be swept under the rug and poor performance to be tolerated. So this style should be complemented with another style, and used sparingly.

L2L: I was surprised to see democratic as a style of leadership. I suppose many people think that a democratic leader really isn't leading at all, just blowing with the wind of popular opinion.

DG: If someone does just follow the group, you are right, it isn't leading. But that is not what the democratic style is about. The democratic leader is a consensus builder, the person who really listens to other people, who takes their opinions into account in making a decision. This style isn't appropriate for a crisis situation, or when expert knowledge is required. But in situations where the path ahead is unclear, a leader can say in all honesty, "You know, you folks know more about this than I do. What do you think I should do?" The ability to listen gets people on board and makes people feel that they matter. But it can be overused. We've all seen situations with endless team meetings, discussions that go on and on, never reaching any conclusion, except, perhaps to hold another team meeting.

L2L: The last two styles, you say, generally lead to dissonant teams, not resonant teams. Let's take the pacesetter style first.

DG: Yes, the last two styles have their appropriate application but are so often misapplied that they tend to be dissonant. The first dissonant style is a pacesetter. A pacesetter shows up most often in technical fields. The pacesetter is typically someone who, as an individual contributor, was superb, outstanding, a star, which led to the promotion to team leader. The problem is that, if someone does not have the emotional intelligence abilities of leadership, the Peter Principle comes into effect. That is: They have just been promoted to their level of incompetence. All too often, unfortunately, people come into those positions unprepared, unless life (through happenstance) has helped them get some of those abilities. If that's the case, they are likely to become pacesetters.

The pacesetter leads by example (Do it like I do!) and becomes very impatient when people can't meet that standard, which is very high because they are very good. They don't give positive feedback, only negative feedback. So they make people feel bad, and that's why it lowers the emotional climate instead of raising it. It does work well if you are leading a highly motivated, highly competent team, say a crack legal team or a really

fantastic R&D team in genetics or something like that, where you have been able to cherry-pick team members, and they are all like you. Then you can have a really fantastic team. Unfortunately, most teams are not like that. People have a range of talents and a spectrum of abilities in each of those talents, and leaders who don't understand that will become impatient or dissonant.

L2L: And the last style is the commanding style.

DG: The commanding style takes its name from the old command-and-control model, the military model. And this style -- which comes down to: Do it because I say so, I'm the boss -- is fine in the battlefield, but is really almost always inappropriate in team settings. In fact, it's fine in any emergency. But most situations, day to day, are not true emergencies, and the leader who relies only on this style also tends to take an assumption from the emergency into day-to-day office reality that does not hold, which is: This emergency is so important that we don't really care how you feel right now. It doesn't matter. So they ignore the emotional reality; they have no empathy; they couldn't care less. And they typically bark orders. It's almost a dinosaur now, but there are people like that here and there; actually, too many of them still. And that, too, obviously, creates a negative emotional reality. It's not that we shouldn't use those styles; they are appropriate in an emergency, but when they are misapplied, then they don't work.

L2L: Are the best team leaders good at all these styles?

DG: The best leaders we find are adept at four or more, and which four may differ. People have different styles of leading. But it's interesting; we found, both in the business sector and in education, that leaders who have a full repertoire have the best success. There was a Hay Group study of heads of U.K. schools. They found that if the head of the school had displayed a critical mass of these styles, that predicted that the students would have the best academic performance. And in the black box, of course, is how the teachers feel about teaching there.

L2L: One of Frances Hesselbein's favorite phrases is "dispersed leadership." Few people have a complete range, are equally skilled in all six -- or even four -- styles. If we disperse leadership across the team, doesn't that give us a better chance of having an appropriate mix of styles?

DG: I would say that, if you have a harmonious team, the team leads itself, in the sense that if the ostensible leader isn't doing it right in a moment, anyone on the team can step forward and become the leader in that moment. Perhaps by being a democratic leader, saying, "Maybe this is a good time to hear what other people have to say." Or even help coach each other. In other words, the leadership styles are not necessarily displayed only by the ostensible leader; I think leadership is always dispersed to some extent.

A harmonious team can lead itself.

L2L: Earlier, you said resonant leaders build emotional capital. Is this sort of like a bank account?

DG: By emotional capital I mean the sum total of positive feeling that a leader has built up. You can draw against it when you really need it, and you build it every chance you get, and you build it through the resonant leadership styles. And leaders who don't have it find that, when all of a sudden there's a downturn or there's an emergency, nobody's behind them. People will desert you when the chips are down, but if you have built the capital, they will stand by you. That's when resonance on a team makes all the difference.



Leadership Styles for Resonant Teams

Leadership Style	How It Builds Resonance	Impact on Climate	When Appropriate
<i>Visionary</i>	Moves people toward shared dreams	Most strongly positive	When change requires a new vision, or when a clear direction is needed
<i>Coaching</i>	Connects what a person wants with the team's goals	Highly positive	To help a person contribute more effectively to the team
<i>Affiliative</i>	Creates harmony by connecting people to each other	Positive	To heal rifts in a team, motivate during stressful times, or strengthen connections
<i>Democratic</i>	Values people's input and gets commitment through participation	Positive	To build buy-in or consensus, or to get valuable input from team members
<i>Pacesetting</i>	Sets challenging and exciting goals	Frequently highly negative because poorly executed	To get high-quality results from a motivated and competent team
<i>Commanding</i>	Soothes fears by giving clear direction in an emergency	Often highly negative because misused	In a crisis, to kick-start a turnaround

Used by permission of Harvard Business School Press. Adapted from Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee. Copyright 2002 by Daniel Goleman. All rights reserved.

[Return to reference](#)

Copyright © 2002 by Daniel Goleman. Reprinted with permission from *Leader to Leader*, a publication of the Leader to Leader Institute and Jossey-Bass.