



Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence

by Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

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If...you have yet to think about the power of emotions in the workplace, *Primal Leadership* is mandatory reading. Daniel Goleman of Rutgers University joins with Richard Boyatzis, of Case Western Reserve and Annie McKee of the University of Pennsylvania to expand upon the benefits of emotional intelligence described in Daniel Goleman's bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). *Primal Leadership* makes a case for emotionally attuned leaders and why they bring out more in their employees than commanding and pace-setting leaders. We learn that successful leaders resonate on an emotional level with their employees, whereas dissonant leaders by contrast, have shortcomings that undermine their firm's potential for success.

Primal Leadership drives home the painfully obvious downside of getting stuck with a miserable boss, yet this work offers a silver lining in that something can be done about it given that emotional intelligence is learnable. The problem with dissonant bosses is that they lack skills in either of the two main domains of emotional intelligence: (1) personal and (2) social. The authors argue that dissonant leaders can strengthen their personal competence including their own self-awareness and self-management; or their social competence, which includes social awareness and relationship management. The key is developing a flexible leadership style that is designed to draw in and motivate employees via a repertoire of skills including visioning, coaching, affiliative behavior, and democratic style.

The case for developing primal leadership is presented in three parts beginning with the concept of primal leadership, followed in Part II by the process of making leaders, and then concluding in Part III with reasons to build an emotionally intelligent organization. Part I (Chapters 1-5) utilizes a combination of anecdotal stories, leadership theory, and neuro-psychological overlay. Part II (Chapters 6-8) describes how leaders are made through a process of learning that begins with self-evaluation and is followed by self-directed learning. Primal leaders develop via a three-step process that can be summarized as bringing bad habits into awareness, practicing better ways, and rehearsing at every opportunity. Thus, true leaders are made not born. Part III (Chapters 9-11) addresses the need for emotionally intelligent organizations. This is essentially an organizational development proposition. The problem is described in terms of toxic organizations headed by dissonant leaders. The paradox of such organizations is that learning rarely occurs because companies and their professionals thrive on routines that invariably perpetuate toxicity.

This is an important book if for no other reason than its popularization of the idea that we need far more emotionally attuned managers. The particulars of how this achieved within an organizational context, however, are disappointingly vague as no systematic research model is



presented. Scholarly readers are likely to recognize tried-and-true leadership, motivation, and organizational development theories in a new wrapper. For example, leadership begins with vision that moves towards shared goals or that leaders should employ coaching skills using an affiliative/democratic style. Leaders without these skills should learn them by using 360 degree feedback followed by mental rehearsal of needed skills and practice at every opportunity, not the most original stuff. The dual shortcomings of *Primal Intelligence* are that it teases leaders who may wish to know more but does not provide the necessary how-to-steps; and it does not offer theory-based academic researchers a clear framework upon which future research may rely. Readers of the first category may need to hire a consultant. The authors are actively involved in an organizational development consultancy (Hay Group). Readers of the latter category may wish to participate in a scholarly discussion group on the web called Emonet. More than 300 emotions at work scholars are members of this listserv since its establishment in 1997 (http://www.uq.edu.au/emonet/emonet_mem_jan02.xls).

The context for *Primal Leadership* is useful to keep in mind. This book falls within the general sphere of leadership studies. Recent parallels include research on transformational leadership that also speaks to the idea of emotionally reaching one's followers to motivate via identification with shared values and higher purpose (see, Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). It should also be noted that the power to emotionally inspire followers carries with it the potential for manipulation and destructive outcomes a topic not addressed in *Primal Leadership* (see, Conger, 1990).

Last, emotional intelligence is actually a subset of a growing research domain known as emotions at work. For a summary see Fisher and Ashkanasy (2000, p. 125) and seminal work by Salovey and Mayer (1990). The excitement generated by this new area of research is grounded in the enormous potential to explain behavior in organizations via the role of emotions. Among the important advances in this area of research has been the development of a widely respected theoretical framework, Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). AET provides a conceptual basis for understanding emotions at work. The theory suggests that affective events create moods or emotions that mediate job attitudes and behaviors. Interestingly, moods may predict spontaneous acts of behavior or changes in affective components of attitudes, for example a decision to quit or job satisfaction. AET is a greatly promising framework that is now building momentum and promises to shed light on organizational functioning for years to come. The authors of *Primal Leadership* have an important message that may be more broadly received if they apply more rigorous theoretical underpinnings such as AET.



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