

*“Primal Leadership:
Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence”*

By: Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee

Publisher: Harvard Business School Press

Reviewer: Michael L Schwartz

General Opinions:

This book, when you cut to the heart of the matter, talks about leaders involving people, making people feel good about themselves and what they do.

Much of the book discusses why this is true by explaining how the brain operates. There is discussion how neurotransmitters work and how neural-chemical reactions occur in the brain. These explanations are done in lay terms so that anyone can understand them. There are also examples given of how this has worked. And some examples are given where, due to lack of proper implementation, this did not work.

The authors discuss Resonance, which is when leaders drive emotions positively. And they discuss Dissonance, which is where leaders drive emotions negatively. I have experienced both of these (as I'm sure everyone has) and I must agree that when I am in a condition of resonance I feel better and am more productive.

Resonance and Dissonance are driven by the leader's Emotional Intelligence. Which is how the leader handles themselves and their relationships. Humans tend to mirror, the authors state. That is they tend to match the psychological state of those around them. I had not really thought about this before reading this book, but on reflection I can think of times where I have experienced this phenomenon first hand. I've had more than one occasion when getting home from work, in a relatively good mood and being greeted by my wife, who was in a bad mood due to a bad day and my mood just "went south". (Of course, there's been time where these roles were reversed.) Or time when you have lunch with coworkers and as soon as one person begins to gripe soon everyone is griping and in a rotten state of mind.

I generally think the authors did a good job in explaining how moods and feelings (of our leaders) affect our attitudes and our work.

Important Concepts:

I found the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) very valuable. The whole concept of how one person's "mental state" can influence all those around them was very interesting to me. Along with that how the four EI domains (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management) are learned abilities.

For much of my life I thought that these were attributes that you either had or did not have, or that if they were learned at all it was while you were very young and you were then "set for life". I was glad to read that research shows that these attributes can be learned later in life, that it just takes more time and more effort.

So, the concept, noted above, that the brain can be "reprogrammed" to operate differently than it had been trained to operate was very "eye-opening" to me. That we are not "hard wired" from birth is very meaningful to me. It tells me that I can continue to grow as a person and improve myself in how I deal with others. If I only continue long enough I can and will improve all four areas of EI, but for me, most importantly Relationship Management.

Another important concept, for me, was that the brain can grow new cells. This indicates that decline in mental capacities, as we age, is not necessarily inevitable. It also means that we can develop new skills as we age. With people living and working longer, it's good to know that we can continue to remain (mentally) active and productive. While I'm not (yet) what most people would consider old, I know people who have stopped exercising, and expanding their minds and I have seen them go into a slow and steady mental decline. I'm glad to know that's not inevitable.