

## **PODCAST: How to Boost Your Emotional Intelligence**

Strong leadership is about more than being the smartest person in the room. On this episode of The Insightful Leader, we offer tips to become more aware of yourself and those around you.

### **TRANSCRIPT**

**Jessica LOVE:** Emotional intelligence has always been important in leadership. But these days, it may be more important than ever. This has been pretty crazy year for everyone...but everyone's crazy year has nonetheless been uniquely crazy. Meaning you may have NO IDEA what your colleagues are struggling with...or them you.

So Brenda Ellington Booth has a word of advice.

**Brenda Ellington BOOTH:** Anytime you face a crowd, it could be your staff, it could be a group of people that you're on Zoom with, it's helpful to get a pulse check in terms of where you are. And that actually is one of the key tenants of emotional intelligence, is understanding what you're facing. And not to make the assumption if you're feeling one way that your audience is feeling something the same way. And they could be at very different places.

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**LOVE:** Welcome to The Insightful Leader from the Kellogg School of Management. In today's episode, you'll be hearing from Brenda Ellington Booth, who initially spoke with us at our inaugural Insightful Leader Live event. Booth is a clinical professor of leadership and a certified executive coach. She'll be explaining what emotional intelligence (or EQ) is, but mostly she'll be sharing tons of practical tips for how you can boost your own "EQ."

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### **What Is Emotional Intelligence?:**

**LOVE:** Over the last few decades, it has become increasingly clear that being a successful leader often takes more than intelligence, technical skills, and a desire to lead.

**BOOTH:** It wasn't until Daniel Goleman came around with his research on emotional intelligence that said, you know what, it's just not being smart. It's just not intelligence. It's more than that. And it's more than just having a high level of energy or stamina to take on the role of leadership.

You can be the smartest person in the room, but it's not going to have a strong correlation to your success as much as EQ does.

**LOVE:** So what IS emotional intelligence? According to Booth, it can be broken down into four different components.

**BOOTH:** Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

**LOVE:** And the first two of these components, self-awareness and self-management, Booth refers to as personal competencies.

**BOOTH:** Self-awareness is literally about how you're feeling in the moment. It's that self-check in. What are you feeling right now. Sometimes, if you notice your feeling, you might have a choice to make.

**LOVE:** That choice is the “self-management” part. Now that you’re aware, what are you going to do about it? Will you respond instead of merely reacting?

If self-awareness and self-management are sounding a little abstract, here’s a nice concrete example for you. It involves a previous client of Booth’s.

**BOOTH:** The senior leadership team was about twelve men, and they were all really bright. And the culture of the environment was extremely competitive. And everyone was very blunt. However, this woman, that wasn't her style. And she also was very new in her role. So she, frankly, felt insecure.

**LOVE:** During meetings, if this member of the senior leadership team ever felt herself getting defensive or called out, she would start to cry.

**BOOTH:** She knew that she was crying, she knew she wanted to change, but it was really kind of feeling and understanding what was making her cry. So, we worked really hard to figure out okay, she was able to ascertain what kind of responses would trigger her. And then she had choice in the moment.

**LOVE:** Once this client knew herself a little better, knew what in particular triggered or upset her, she could CHOOSE how to respond. Sometimes she might respond with a script she had developed with Booth, to address those direct criticisms. And other times, she might respond by politely leaving the meeting for a few moments to catch her breath.

But the key to self-awareness, and then self-management, is to know yourself better.

**BOOTH:** So sometimes it's about just understanding what your triggers are, and then making a choice, but many of us don't even know what our triggers are.

**LOVE:** So how do you find out what your triggers are, especially if you aren’t working with your own executive coach?

Booth suggests stopping yourself, taking a breath, and doing a quick body scan to see where you might be feeling tense. Ask yourself “how am I feeling?” and “what do I need?” Are you hungry?

Tired? Do interactions with a particular colleague set you off? Do certain situations often lead you to behave in ways you don't want to?

Maybe keep a journal, to help identify patterns.

And then – once you've become aware of your triggers, and can tell when you're having an off-day, you can begin to make choices that will manage those triggers and your emotions.

**BOOTH:** Given how you feel, what do you need to do? What choices do you need to make?

Cause again, all of this leadership stuff, times of uncertainty, if you're having an off day, it's so important just to check in how you feel because people are going to pick up on something. And it does come through Zoom.

**LOVE:** One practical self-management tip Booth offers is to set an “intention” before every Zoom meeting.

**BOOTH:** What do you want to get out of this meeting? Or how do you want to show up for this meeting? How do you want to be perceived, and if you are feeling a little bit off or antsy. Then there's gonna be a mismatch between how you feel and how you want to. And so you might need to do something to shift your own energy or to help you focus.

**LOVE:** And if you are having an off-day, and are feeling especially vulnerable to your triggers or simply overwhelmed, it's OK to take a break, reschedule, pause before sending an email, or sleep on making a major decision.

**BOOTH:** So many times we feel pressure to make decisions. But sometimes, we don't have to make a decision right now unless it's a real emergency. And sometimes the better decisions I made, were when I said, “You know what? That's the stakes are too high, I'm going to delay and not make a decision and sleep on it.” And particularly when you're angry. So that goes back to emotional intelligence, right? If you are feeling angry or frustrated, please don't hit the send button. Because you might have to clean up something that you didn't intend, particularly if you give yourself some time and space, really thinking about your audience.

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**LOVE:** Booth had another client, a highly successful director of an organization. But something wasn't quite working for him at work, and he couldn't figure out why.

**BOOTH:** He was a tall guy, he walked around with a frown on his face all the time. And then when he would have team meetings, he would abruptly stand up and pace and walk around. So you can imagine what his feedback was, right? Intimidating, distant, unapproachable. Really, he was one of the nicest people I've ever met. But what was really going on with him was that he suffered from extreme back pain. So he knew that he was in pain. But he chose not to tell anyone for

cultural reasons, for personal reasons, because in his mind sharing about that pain was to him, weakness. And he didn't want weakness or pity from his people. However, people were still seeing something on him. And his behavior, once you understood now, made sense.

**LOVE:** So although this client knew and understood his own pain, he didn't quite understand how his behavior impacted his colleagues and team, and how they perceived him.

Which brings us to the next components of emotional intelligence: social awareness and relationship management.

**BOOTH:** So social awareness is not being self-focused, but other-focused. So you might have a sense of how you're doing, and you might be fine. But then it's reading the room or reading another person and having a sense of what's going on with them.

I was working with another client of mine recently. And they were telling me that this woman, when she would get on the phone, she was very, very direct. And people would say, Whew, that was a tense meeting. She wasn't reading the room. She wasn't recognizing that her directness was causing people to almost recoil. And so, having the wherewithal to read the room, and having the confidence even to say, wait a minute, I'm sensing something here. Stopping it, and really adjusting to what you're sensing is really helpful.

**LOVE:** So if social awareness is reading others, and adjusting yourself accordingly, relationship management takes it one step further. It's using this knowledge to build and strengthen your relationship with others.

**BOOTH:** It's not only looking at and reading the room and getting a sense of what's going on, but then really kind of almost intuiting, or even asking what the team or the other person might need.

And so if you're not reading the room, and if you don't kind of even ask perhaps what people might need or want, you miss vital cues, and you lose your effectiveness as a leader. So clearly, now, you can see in these more social situations, where leadership effectiveness is highly correlated and linked to a successful leader.

**LOVE:** A good guiding principle when managing relationships, according to Booth, is to consider how you, as a leader make people feel.

**BOOTH:** My definition of a successful leader is someone who has followers, basically. People who are willing to follow you. And it has two dimensions, certainly the cognitive part or the intelligence part, but we also talk about the warmth part as well. So, there's this mix of warmth and competence, that go into really what it means to be an emotionally intelligent leader. You need both. And it's just not about being the smartest person in the room. But how you're making people feel. When they leave a meeting with you, how are they feeling? Do they feel deflated? Do they feel energized? And a lot of that is you being able to read the room.

**LOVE:** At a very minimum, look for moments when you can make the people around you feel appreciated.

**BOOTH:** And then the other thing is when you are feeling upbeat, spread your joy, send an acknowledgement that is if you think of, you know, someone makes you smile, let them know that person made you smile. There is a lot of research showing that people feel under-appreciated at work. And because we have little bubbles over our head that sometimes we might think something, but we never speak it. If you are in a good mood, you might make someone's day as well. So, making the choice if you're feeling good, you know, is there someone that you can acknowledge?

**LOVE:** And remember, you don't have to be eloquent or extroverted to be emotionally intelligent. You can acknowledge people, and build connections with them, in lots of ways.

**BOOTH:** One of my favorite stories is about the former CEO of Campbell's Soup Company. His name is Doug Conant. He literally, at the end of every day, would write thank you notes to his employees that, he wanted to acknowledge. He had gotten into a horrible car accident. He was lucky to be alive. And then when he was in the hospital, he got literally 1000s of well wishes from his team, and from the employees of his organization. But that was his habit of just acknowledging people. If you're in the space to do it, it can have huge motivational impact, on those that you work with.

**LOVE:** Of course, connecting with others, and trying to meet their needs, does NOT mean just saying "Yes" to everyone, or patiently listening to them as they vent for hours on end.

**BOOTH:** You have to have a boundary. As a leader, as a manager. And so you want to be empathetic, but you don't want to become someone's therapist. And so it's that delicate balance of, you know, showing that you care, but then maybe saying, you know what, let me give you some resources where you can handle that.

And it's really hard these days, because people have so many issues on their plate. And you it really is about having a dialogue with someone, but also using your judgment as well.

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### **Can Emotional Intelligence Be Learned?**

**LOVE:** So: what's your EQ? According to Booth, emotional intelligence is a combination of nature and nurture: genetics and environment. Some people will naturally have stronger self-awareness or relationship-management skills. But Booth says not to worry.

**BOOTH:** I've worked with people all over the map on these issues. And I can say with confidence, it can be changed. But it takes a lot of dedication to do this. Because you are maybe fighting

against some instincts that you have, maybe from a personality trait that you have, and/or maybe that muscle that you've built up over the years because of your environment.

However, EQ can be learned, and that's the great news. It just takes a will. If you understand kind of where you are on the emotional intelligence spectrum, and you know that you might be good at reading people, but sometimes you ignore yourself. Or vice versa. Having that baseline understanding can make all the difference in the world.

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**Credits:**

**LOVE:** This episode of *The Insightful Leader* was produced by Kevin Bailey, Kim Buikema, Jessica Love, Fred Schmalz, Michael Spikes, and Emily Stone. It was written and edited by Kim Buikema and sound designed and mixed by Michael Spikes.

Special thanks to Professor Brenda Ellington Booth.

As a reminder, you can find us on iTunes, Google Play, or our website. If you like this show, please leave us a review or rating. That helps new listeners find us.

And, if you want more leadership tips from real experts, you should sign up for our free weekly email newsletter. It's packed with ideas and research from one of the world's top business schools...the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. To sign up, go to [kell.gg/email](http://kell.gg/email). Or check out our webinar series, the Insightful Leader Live, at [kell.gg/webinar](http://kell.gg/webinar). That's where our conversation with Prof. Booth was originally recorded.

We'll be back in a couple weeks with another episode of *The Insightful Leader*.