

Why Emotional Intelligence

is the

Most Important
Area of Your
Leadership
Right Now

By Julianne Cenac, PhD

As you have discussions about a return to work policy in your department, keep emotional intelligence at the forefront of your leadership. Our employees have been through multiple changes, some of them traumatic, within these last months including:

- Fear of loss of employment
- Dealing with a spouse's loss of employment
- Juggling their priorities with co-educating their children at home
- Being on the frontlines of caring for the public with COVID-19 at our hospitals or clinics
- Fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus or spreading it to others
- Unexpected financial expenses or loss of income related to the pandemic
- Caring for a sick family member or friend with the COVID-19 virus or a previous condition
- Missing out on anticipated events like graduations and weddings
- Unable to attend important family gatherings or even funerals
- Isolation away from friends, family or being alone and not having friends or family
- Uncertainty about the future

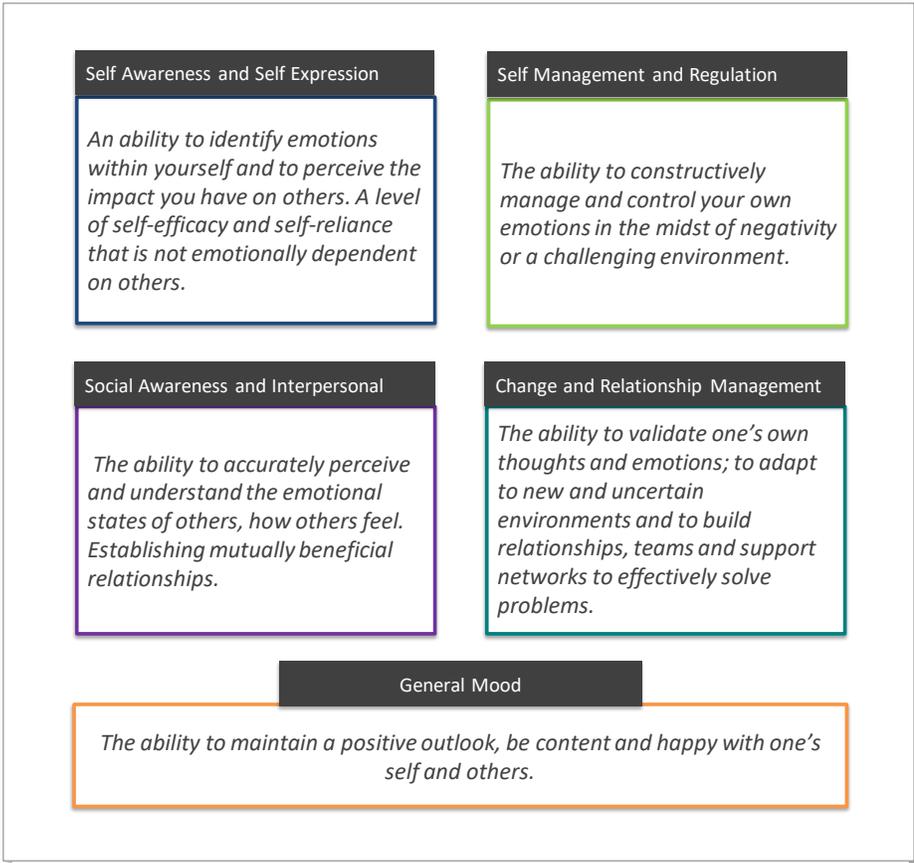
These, in addition to current events across our country, are challenging for employees to cope with in addition to performing their work. While we have resources available to help them deal with the stress of these circumstances ([UTHealth Employee Assistance Programs](#)), as a manager you will often be the first line and first point of contact to our employees. What you say and how you lead in the days ahead will matter to them. How you help our employees engage and return to work matters to UTHealth leadership.

Therefore, to be effective you will need to develop the capacity to relate to employees in genuine ways; better understand their challenges and perspectives. To do this, consider ways to develop and increase your emotional intelligence as a manager.

Emotional Intelligence Defined

Emotional intelligence includes the level of self-awareness, social-awareness and self-regulation of your behavior. It also addresses your ability to remain positive and manage your emotions and the needs of others in constructive ways. It means that leaders are adaptive, resilient to change and can build genuine relationships with others and solve problems. The Bar-On model of Emotional Intelligence provides an evidence-based framework for better understanding how to lead with higher levels of EI. The core constructs of the model are further described below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Reuven Bar-On Model of Emotional Intelligence



Self-Awareness and Self-Expression

There is a reason flight attendants tell parents to put the mask on first in the event of unexpected changes to altitude and environment. When dealing with unexpected change and impact to your

environment, focus on your [self-care](#) to ensure that you are emotionally fit to handle the challenges and impact of serving and meeting your employees' needs. Leadership is sacrificial. It seeks the interest of others and ensures that others are cared for and whole. As a result, it will help if you are strengthened personally to have something left, something available within you and your leadership to be present and engaged with your employees.

Social-Awareness and Interpersonal Relationships

Recent engagement surveys with our employees indicate that they are dealing with a range of emotions including fear and uncertainty. As a manager, through your leadership you can help engage your employees by sharing your concern for them and their families. You can provide resources to them like our [UTHealth Employee Assistance Programs](#) so that they can seek professional help through counseling, financial and legal services among others. You can also provide consistent and informative communication so that employees know about new developments or policies that may affect them. As leaders, we encourage your pro-active engagement. You do not need to wait for an employee to approach you. Instead, look for opportunities to serve your team members. Look for opportunities and methods to take the initiative to engage with them and empathize with them.

Self-management and Self-Regulation

Are you dealing with stress and pressure in your own life? Do you have other challenges that you are dealing with such as moving; buying a house; managing your child's transition to (or back to) college or university in the middle of a pandemic; managing financial pressure or talking to your child about recent events in the news? Each of these examples represent unique stressors and dealing with any one of these alone could be daunting. Therefore, how you cope with stress while having the awareness to self-regulate your leadership behavior on display to your team members is important. Finding the right balance for you will help here so that your own emotions do not spill over into your leader behavior.

Relationship Management

Relationship management is very relevant to our current situation. It is important because relationship management is how you integrate the areas of self-awareness and social awareness in your emotional intelligence. Through relationship management, you can better adapt to uncertainty and change in your environment. In your leadership, this skill will help you be more resilient and effective. It will also help you build better relationships with colleagues and help you be more collaborative with problem solving in high-stress environments.

Developing Your Emotional Intelligence

In previous years, even decades, the strongest qualities of one's leadership were measured by personality traits, communication skills and presence. Those areas are still important to effective leadership. But, your level of emotional intelligence and your ability to apply it when leading are vitally important to your success when leading in today's society. Some leaders are born with natural

abilities to be empathic or social. But, if you do not naturally possess these skills, you can develop them. You can develop your level of emotional intelligence in your leadership. UTHealth offers several development programs and online/on-demand training courses that are available to you including:

Management Development Academy

Executive Leadership Institute

Emerging Leaders Institute

Women in Leadership Seminar Series

LinkedIn Learning Online Courses

For more information about these programs, or, to enroll and get started, email the Learning and Development team at iLearn@uth.tmc.edu or call (713) 500-3169. We are here to help you.

Again, as managers, you are in an important position to help our employee's transition back to the physical workplace. We are counting on you to demonstrate a level of emotional intelligence in your leadership to show patience, care and concern for each employee's unique needs while balancing the operational priorities of your team or department. In doing so, we will help provide a safe environment for our employees and productive one as well.