

## People Skills Drive Leadership Success

Most people aspire to be effective in their work efforts. They get a good education, learn important technical skills, and stay up on the latest industry trends. These are all important steps to a person's success in business and yet,...

As a person advances in responsibility within an organization a shift takes place. It is a shift from performing the technical work one's self to getting the technical work done through others. At first, it seems like simply getting good at managing. But if you've been at this even a short time, you soon realize that it's not always as easy as it looks. The truth is that what you are really managing is the process, not the people. Things get managed. People get led.

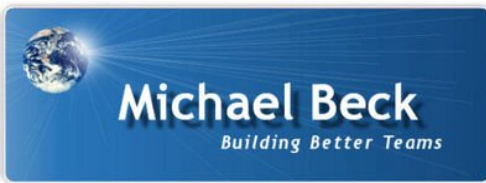
Managing is about things. It's about process and task. You can manage time, products, inventory, and budgets. People, on the other hand, must be led. What happens when someone attempts to manage people? We've all seen the results. People resent being treated as "things". What happens when we're treated like "things"? We become alienated, resentful, resistant, complacent, and unenthused. Someone who treats people as things is often insensitive, unsympathetic, and focused on self rather than others. People, teams, and organizations must be led.

What does "leading" mean, as opposed to "managing"? Leading people comes down to **Relationship Management**. Effectively leading people, teams, or anyone else for that matter, relies on several competencies. These competencies are:

- **Developing Others** - Building others' abilities
- **Inspirational Leadership** - Having a compelling vision to lead with
- **Change Catalyst** - The ability to initiate, manage, and lead in a new direction
- **Influence** - The ability to utilize persuasion
- **Conflict Management** - The ability to resolve disagreements
- **Teamwork and Collaboration** - The ability to build and guide teams

These ideas aren't just my best guess. They're supported by a good deal of research as well. These people skills are well defined and discussed within the concepts set forth in the groundbreaking work done by Daniel Goleman on **Emotional Intelligence**. Studies have demonstrated that leaders who consistently outperform their peers not only have the technical skills required, but more importantly, have mastered most of the aspects of Emotional Intelligence. The four main areas of Emotional Intelligence are: **Self-Awareness, Self- Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management**.

Improving one's Emotional Intelligence starts with some Self-Awareness competencies and ultimately leads to effective Relationship Management. Many of the EI competencies are tightly related to one another, and improving competency in one area will often positively affect competency in other areas. Competence in each of these areas will help anyone become better at working with people. Proficiency



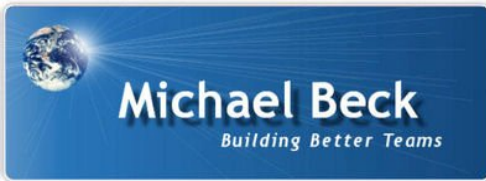
in certain sets of these competencies will propel a leader and an organization towards greater productivity, greater satisfaction, and increased profitability. Leaders who build their **Relationship Management** skills find they have the ability to improve profitability, growth, satisfaction, teamwork, and vision.

How does someone improve their Relationship Management skills? It's actually not as easy as it may appear at first glance to be. Although the goal is excellent Relationship Management, it starts with attaining and honing the ability to be aware of one's self and of the "emotional currents" of others. In addition, it requires one to effectively manage one's emotional triggers – especially the destructive ones. I'll get to the "How" of development in a minute, but first we need to mention two more things which are required for leadership success – and are related to everything we've discussed so far. These two important things are Effective Communication Skills and High Personal Integrity.

In order to be influential, develop people, build consensus, and share a vision effectively, a leader must be an effective communicator. This means learning how to read people, how to be an active listener, and how to present in such a way that the other person best understands. A good understanding of Social Styles, along with putting this knowledge to work is essential in mastering communication. On the issue of high personal integrity, it can be viewed like an on-off switch, which affects everything else. In other words, no matter how good a communicator you are, no matter how proficient you are at leadership skills, and no matter what your purpose/vision, if you are perceived as lacking integrity, everything else will be discounted. Effective leadership, communication and people skills mean nothing unless backed by high personal integrity.

Those points out of the way, let's return to answer the question of how to improve one's Relationship Management skills. There are several challenges to improving the competencies necessary for effective relationship management.

**1. How We Process Information** We process information – knowledge, technical information, etc. in the neo-cortex portion of our brains. We have the ability to absorb this type of information and put it to use immediately. For instance, if we read about a technique to use on a spreadsheet application, we can immediately begin using it. However, we process our emotions and our sense of things in the amygdala portion of our brain, and this part of our brain works differently than our neo-cortex. This part of our brain manages our emotions and our habits. In order to make any changes in this realm, we need to break old habits and to form new ones. This isn't about learning new things and applying them. It's about intentionally changing old patterns and about intentionally creating new ones. These changes generally take an ongoing effort and a period of time to achieve. Because of this, improving Relationship Management skills requires a sustained effort and not just an injection of knowledge from a class, book or workshop.



**2. Blind Spots** Since the issues we're dealing with are ones of habit, we're often blind to our own triggers and reactions. We often aren't aware of how we habitually behave. Because of this, it's very difficult to identify, let alone change, those habits we'd prefer to change without outside input – an outside observer. In addition, this observer needs to be someone without an agenda so that the feedback can be received without becoming defensive.

**3. Old Habits** Since the competencies we're trying to improve upon are generally those based in habit, it's difficult often to be aware of when we act in a way we'd rather not. It's pretty important to have someone in the background to help you see events and behaviors you'd prefer to change. A person can improve their Relationship Management skills, but it takes a real desire to change, a clear picture of the competencies that require improvement, and support from someone or some group to help guide the change and keep the person on track.

The payoff? The result is exceptional leadership which inspires the best effort in others, creates greater satisfaction, produces increased results and improves the world. Not bad...