



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston congratulates the first 11 recipients of the Expert Soldier Badge at the annual meeting of the Association of the U.S. Army held Oct. 15, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kris Bonet)

# Power & Influence

## Emotional Intelligence Matters

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**L**earning how to be an effective leader is not acquired in a college course. It is an emotional process that requires personal credibility, empathy, and logic. Clinical psychologist and leadership expert Steven Stein (2017) defines leadership as “the behaviors used in any situation where you influence the thoughts, behaviors, or feelings of one or more people” (p. 14). Greek philosopher Aristotle described this as ethos, pathos, and logos (Covey, 2013). Consequently, it is fair to say that if one approaches leadership from within, development can occur in cycles of insight, humility, and rediscovery. To be an effective organizational leader, sergeants major must have the capacity and emotional literacy to influence the

attitudes and beliefs of others. To do this they must not only emotionally understand themselves, but their subordinates, peers, and superiors as well.

### Emotional Intelligence

According to Harvard theorist Howard Gardner on emotional intelligence/emotional quotient (EQ), “Your EQ is the level of your ability to understand other people, what motivates them and how to work cooperatively with them” (Akers & Porter, 2018, para. 3). The United States Army recognizes the importance of EQ and refers to its four domains—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, repeatedly throughout *Army Doctrine*

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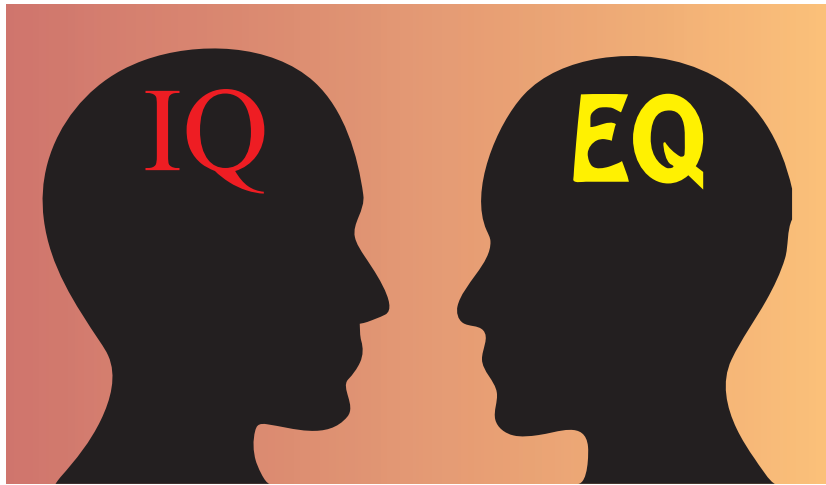
When it comes to effective leadership, some theorists even believe EQ is more important than a leader's intelligence quotient (IQ) (Goldstein, 2017). Emotional skills are essential for optimal performance and become more critical as leaders progress through the organizational hierarchy in comparison to general intelligence or technical savviness. For example, Dulewicz, Young, and Dulewicz (2005) hypothesized that EQ competencies make a more significant contribution to overall performance and leadership than IQ and managerial competencies (MQ) and asserted that "there is a shift towards the importance of emotional intelligence rather than cognitive intelligence for effective leadership" (p. 72).

Interestingly, their findings revealed that EQ accounted for 9.2% of overall performance, while IQ only accounted for 5% and MQ for 6.1%. In regards to leadership, EQ accounted for 13%, while IQ was 9.2%, and MQ 10.4%. Based on this study, EQ appears to make a more significant contribution toward workplace performance and effective leadership than IQ does (Dulewicz et al., 2005).

Furthermore, Gentry, Weber, and Sadri (2007) performed a study of workplace performance that involved leaders from around the world and analyzed data from 6,731 managers from 38 countries. The findings reinforced the significance of emotionally intelligent leadership; however, this time on a global scale. According to Gentry et al. (2007), "empathetic leaders are assets to organizations, in part, because they are able to effectively build and maintain relationships—a critical part of leading organizations anywhere in the world" (p. 9).

Daniel Goleman, an internationally respected psychologist and expert in EQ, stated:

“It is not that IQ and technical skills are irrelevant. They do matter, but mainly as threshold capabilities; that is, they are the entry-level requirements for executive positions. But my research, along with other recent studies, clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still will not make a great leader. (2009, p. 39)”



(U.S. Army graphic illustration by Cassandra Mainiero)

Many leaders in the U.S. Army demonstrate exceptional competence, character, commitment, and courage; however, when it comes to understanding emotions and the impact they have on others, they struggle for proficiency (Fraher, 2011; Keller, 2019; Correll, 2019). According to a study on veterans entering the civilian workforce conducted by Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, "new research suggests veteran job candidates can be typecast as agentic and unemotional, and are likely to be overlooked for jobs that leverage emotional intelligence and interpersonal and leadership skills" ("Research Shows Military Service Can Hurt" 2019, para. 2). The study goes on to show that most managers "showed a tendency to relegate veteran job candidates to roles where they would be working with things rather than people" (para. 3).

Military leaders who are emotionally illiterate are problematic because lack of emotional awareness potentially limits follower commitment and the ability to influence the attitudes and beliefs of others. This affects unit performance and Army retention.

## Personal Experience

Soldiers become formal leaders when they obtain the rank of sergeant. As a U.S. Army noncommissioned officer (NCO), from the rank of sergeant to first sergeant, he or she is sought out by both junior enlisted and officers alike for expertise and mentorship.

As a direct level leader (sergeant through first sergeant), my positional power was formidable as I had significant control and authority over my subordinates. Additionally, I was able to gain meaningful personal power through shared hardships and daily interactions with subordinates. By contrast, as an organizational leader (sergeant major/command sergeant major), my positional power was minimal, as was my interaction and shared hardships with the leaders and Soldiers throughout the organization. To compensate for my lack of positional power, I increased my ability to affect those within my

sphere of influence and strengthen my personal power through the use of positive influence.

Lacking positional power puts a sergeant major at a disadvantage. The use of *soft tactics* (building relationships, personal appeals, consultation, inspiration, participation, and integration) became a priority and assisted my efforts to gain follower commitment, minimizing resistance to change (Yukle & Falbe, 1990; Ginnett, Richard, & Gordon, 2006). Additionally, the use of *rational tactics* (collaboration, exchange, apprising, rational, and persuasion) helped me to negotiate with peers, agencies, and adjacent units, thus creating healthy relationships and win-win situations (Department of the Army, 2019).

Lastly, even though *hard tactics* (coalition, legitimizing, and pressure) are generally associated with positional power, coalition building is invaluable (Montalto, 2019). Quickly establishing positive relationships with every first sergeant in the brigade, for example, helped me build a coalition of direct-level leaders that would ultimately influence the attitudes and beliefs of those under their command. The ability to exercise the application of power through positive influence is acquired over time. This results in a long-term growth of leadership skills which is why I was a far better brigade command sergeant major than battalion.

Every sergeant major must accept that commanders and first sergeants run companies. They do not want or need a sergeant major telling them how to do their job. This also includes executive and operations officers. It is imperative that future sergeants major understand that becoming a sergeant major will be the first time in their careers that they must figure out how to be value-added to their organization.

My advice to all future and current entry-level sergeants major is to exercise patience, assess the organization and its people, and use the application of power and influence, requiring EQ, to solve organizational problems and drive the commander's priorities. Your unit's performance is a reflection of its leadership.

## Conclusion

Learning how to be an emotionally intelligent leader is a continuous process. There is no end state to your improvement when discovering the latest research, experimenting with different methods of influence, adapting to new generations of Soldiers, and building positive relationships. So keep developing yourself and others. The competence, character, and commitment of the NCO Corps depends upon it. ■

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