



*"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Some of you may know this quote made famous by Maya Angelou and nod in agreement whenever you hear it. At its core, it is about having an impact.

Let's consider this in the context of retaining talent in your organization. Let's explore the reasons behind why talent leaves your organization in favour of another. Research shows that people leave their job for several reasons. Among the most common are that they want more meaningful work, they want a better relationship with their direct manager or leader, they want better compensation, and they want to feel appreciated.

While I certainly do not lay all the blame at the feet of the leader, the leader does play a critical role in helping to address the reasons outlined. We can take this even one step further to say that leaders have a responsibility to create the environment where people thrive, an environment where the employee can become the best version of themselves.

Leaders have the power to help employees 'feel' engaged in their organization, and when this happens, it is primarily because of the employee being 'seen' and 'heard'. As a team member, who would not want this type of support?

Let's look at the definition of Emotional Intelligence as set out by Dr Stein and his team at Multi- Health Systems Inc. (MHS).

# RETAIN TOP TALENT: HOW AN EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADER MAKES A DIFFERENCE

*By Angela Payne*

*“Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a set of emotional and social skills that influence the way we perceive and express ourselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges, and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way.”*

This exemplifies the fact that leaders need to have a high level of emotional and social fluency in order to successfully navigate the rough waters of talent management. The strongest drivers of talent retention are the methods by which leaders manage their emotions and how they make others feel.

In this discussion I will make the case for how emotionally intelligent leaders can have the impact they need to keep their company's best talent engaged and productive. I encourage you to use the reflection questions located in different parts of the article to think about A) your presence and B) how your actions are being perceived by your team.

### **Opportunity #1 - Authenticity**

“Know thyself!” gets to the heart of being authentic as a leader. This now modern-day perspective is attributed to Bill George in his book *Authentic Leadership*. While many would recognize that authentic leaders need to be self-aware and genuine, these traits alone will not have your team staying with you. Within the EQ-i2.0 Model of Emotional Intelligence there are three important competencies: Self-Regard, Self-Actualization, and Emotional Self-Awareness that when applied to your leadership style and when used in balance, allow you to

see yourself for who you really are and have the confidence to showcase it to your team. You can show your vulnerability without being concerned about perceived weakness. You can dismiss the idea that showing emotions to your team makes you 'soft'. In fact, it makes you human. Your team is also human and their desire to be led, by a leader whom they respect, will result in increased faith in you and greater commitment to the organization.

### **Reflection:**

Do you provide opportunity for your team to give you feedback? Can you openly share your hopes and your worries to create alignment and common goals?

### **Opportunity #2 - Relationships**

Developing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships underpinned by trust and compassion, are critical skills a leader must continuously cultivate in order for their team to have a sense of belonging. Humans have an innate need to connect and with most people spending more than one third of their lifetime at work; it means that the strength of a relationship really matters.

Through my leadership work and in my own company's workshops, we ask participants to think about their best leader, to visualize that person and to list all the words that come to mind. Almost always, the descriptors focus on how the leader makes them feel. Phrases like 'they care about me', 'they listen', and 'they believe in me'. In a world of high stress levels, underappreciation, and low levels of listening across corporations, the person who can lead with their mind and their heart has a distinct and real advantage.

Brene Brown, a professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, who specializes in human and social connection, once said, "A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong."

This speaks to the idea that when leaders show responsibility for the welfare of their team, they enable an employee to feel support and guidance. This support and guidance creates a sense of belonging that greatly improves a person's capacity for work satisfaction. The result can be characterized by a team member saying, "I have found my people."

Knowing their team on a personal level, and showing them empathy, can help a leader motivate and inspire their team toward challenging and exciting goals to ultimately unlock each individual's potential. The most successful leaders develop their employees, and in doing so, create the loyalty needed to maintain a productive team.

### **Reflection:**

Are you vigilant of others' reactions, both verbal and nonverbal?

Do you need to ask another question?

Do you seek to understand? Or to respond?

What have you done to earn the trust of your team?

### **Opportunity #3 - Clarity of Purpose**

An organization needs to define its purpose for everyone. The leader needs to help their team connect with that purpose so that they can have meaningful contribution. Employees across thousands of studies cite

wanting to have a positive impact on the world. They want to be connected to an organization that is making a difference, one that gives them a sense of meaning, one that elicits their support.

Having a strong leader who has the emotional intelligence to use their expression to both verbally and non-verbally articulate that purpose is crucial as it acts as a link between the organization and the employee. On its own this does not guarantee success. There still exists a need for a clear and compelling story to tie each piece of the puzzle together in order to propel the organization forward. When an employee can actualize this, they can be better. More importantly, they will do better.

### **Reflection:**

Is there clarity of purpose, strategy, and responsibility in your team?

Do you regularly promote the growth and achievement of your employees?

As we wrap up our discussion on this interesting topic, we see that there is no one magical answer to retaining a company's top talent. People are complex and beautifully unique. If organizations can invest in and feverishly support highly emotionally intelligent leaders who leverage authenticity, relationships, and clarity of purpose to their fullest, the odds of engaging and growing the loyalty of your employees is much greater on your pathway to success.



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Angela is the co-founder of LeedHR and the National President of the not-for profit Lean In Canada organization, she also Chairs the Executive Impact committee for the Human Resources Professional Association, Toronto.

Her company, LeedHR which is a leadership development firm (assessment, training and team coaching) believes that the single most impactful way of increasing employee engagement within an organization is by helping leaders develop the fundamentals of emotional intelligence skills.

Angela and her firm are linked by their belief that emotional intelligence skills are, more than ever, essential for empowering leaders to successfully lead teams and organizations in today's business environment. Their belief is supported by their own personal journey of leading and being led by leaders with high and low emotional intelligence. Moreover, the World Economic Forum has identified, in its 2018 Future of Job report, emotional intelligence as being one of the top skills required by 2022.

Our mission is to help leaders lead with better human skills. Consequently, allowing their organizations to benefit from a better leadership culture that leads to increased employee engagement and productivity.

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