



INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP SERIES

Leading with Resonance

Emotional Literacy and the Open Loop System of the Brain



At its most fundamental level, leadership is emotional. Inspirational leaders orchestrate the emotional climate of resonance, where ease and harmony prevail, and creativity and productivity abound. Resonance is about a wide array of attitudes and behaviors that have “good will” at their core... openness, forward movement, inspiration, optimism, inclusion, etc.

Simply put, resonance can be described as harmony. Harmony is a felt experience requiring high intentions towards one another, enjoyment of each other’s company, feeling in sync, and enthusiastically contributing to a project. Each individual feels good about themselves and the contribution that they make - they see themselves as capable and as a valuable member of the team. Their teammates see them in the same light. Camaraderie exists and a willingness to face into any obstacle, including personality and communication differences. The team is driven by purpose and vision.

Poor leadership facilitates an emotional climate of dissonance, where stress and stagnation inhibit team members’ ability to do their best work. Dissonant environments exhibit attitudes and behaviors that have “fear” at their core... conflict,

holding back, turf wars, gossip, defensiveness, skepticism, etc.

Dissonance is about discord, apathy, and withholding. Dissonant environments are often characterized by team members only doing the minimum, going through the motions, playing it safe, or just showing up for the paycheck. There is an absence of purpose resulting in team members being separated from their natural gifts and talents, and skills are not optimized. Interactions with other team members tend to be out of necessity rather than a genuine desire to connect. Stress prevails and survival is frequently the focus.

The emotional impact from what a leader says and does is the primary factor in the creation of resonant vs. dissonant environments. Creating resonance requires the understanding that all emotions WILL be present in the workplace and, IF ALLOWED AND EMBRACED will bring valuable learning opportunities.

But in a culture such as ours, where emotions are taboo - especially in the workplace - the healthy inclusion of emotion is awkward at best, and usually non-

In the modern organization, the primary task of the leader is emotional; driving the collective emotions in a positive direction and clearing the smog created by toxic emotions. This task applies to leadership everywhere, from the boardroom to the shop floor.

*~Dan Goleman
Primal Leadership*





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existent. Emotions in and of themselves are often considered “too personal”.

What is more true is that emotional illiteracy runs rampant in our culture - we literally do not have a healthy relationship with emotions. Because of our early childhood programming, most people do not even have an emotional vocabulary, much less know how to healthily experience, express, and include emotion in their daily life.

So it is an Inspirational Leader who is willing to take the high road and cultivate a workplace where emotional literacy is simply part of every day life. Instead of trying to push emotions aside, ignore them, manage over the top of them, or outlaw them, including emotion is a healthy path that leads to greater happiness, self-esteem, authenticity, and reduced stress - which leads to greater productivity, harmony, and creative expression.

As a leader you have a choice - resonance or dissonance - and your impact ripples out to your team one way or the other. You see, your team has no life of it's own, only the life that you give it as a leader, and then the life that each team member contributes. The quality of that contribution is what creates resonance or dissonance.

Think of your team as a top-notch orchestra, where each team member (musician) is committed to mastering their own instrument. It is this mastery that allows the orchestra to play a resonant sound - a pleasant sound - a beautiful sound - an interesting sound - an intriguing sound - but resonance nonetheless. When any musician plays off key, it affects the sound of the entire orchestra - there is dissonance.

To be an Inspirational Leader requires a great amount of skill, awareness, and willingness. It demands that you engage in your own evolution - consciously developing yourself personally and professionally, and taking the high road in how you interact with your team and foster their growth. Leading with resonance begins with you developing your own emotional literacy. Only leaders with healthy emotional expression will be able to “be with” and guide the emotions of others.

It is NOT about pasting on a happy face. Instead, emotional literacy includes all emotions. A simple emotional vocabulary is: Happy, Angry, Sad, and Scared. In any given moment emotional literacy involves three primary steps:

- 1) Knowing what emotion you are experiencing, where it is located in your body, and how it is impacting your behavior.
- 2) Fluently experiencing the emotion, expressing it in a healthy way, and releasing it from your body.
- 3) Listening to the deeper truth and wisdom behind the emotion related to the situation... truth and wisdom that cannot be accessed through cognitive thinking alone. And in that deeper truth are clues to the future, and what is being called for right now.

So at the core of resonance and dissonance is emotion.

Perhaps a basic understanding of brain physiology would be helpful,

“Our feelings are central to life – they are made of the raw energy that drives and motivates our existence – and to be cut off from them is to suffer a slow, silent erosion of the spirit.”
~Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks

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Leading with Resonance

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To learn more about leading with resonance, go to the Products page of my website and download articles, tools, and models.

Article:
Lizard Brain, How Fear Compromises Performance

Model:
Emergence of an Inspirational Leader

Model:
Highly Effective Resonant Teams



especially as it relates to how one person's emotions affect another.

As human beings we each contain a myriad of systems in our bodies - some are closed systems, and some are open systems. For instance, your circulatory and digestive systems are closed - what is going on in your bloodstream and in your digestion has nothing to do what is going on in mine. On the other hand, your limbic system (the emotional center of your brain) is an open loop system. That means that your emotions can affect mine and visa versa.

Consider a time when you walked into a room filled with intense emotion, whether that be shouting... or silence that you could cut with a knife. Remember how this situation affected you. Now consider a time when you walked into a room where laughter and celebration was present and how that affected you. The bottom line is... our limbic system is an open loop system and that means that our emotions affect one another.

In his book, *Primal Leadership*, Dan Goleman (one of the leading authorities on emotional intelligence) says this about the limbic center:

"The continual interplay of limbic open loops among members of a group creates a kind of emotional soup, with everyone adding his or her own flavor to the mix. But it is the leader who adds the strongest seasoning. Why? Because of that enduring reality of business: Everyone watches the boss. People take their emotional cues from the top, Even when the boss isn't highly visible - for example, the CEO who works behind closed doors on an

upper floor - his attitude affects the mood of his direct reports, and the domino effect ripples throughout the company's emotional climate."

So teams are always going to respond to the leader's emotions and to one another's emotions. Resonant leaders propel emotions in a positive way, while skillfully clearing the fog of contracted emotions (anger, sadness, fear), which also need expression. Let's face it, disappointment happens, projects fail, workforces get reduced, team members become ill or die, family members do the same, life happens. All the while emotion is present.

As human beings we experience an emotion the moment we were born, and we experience an emotion in the moment of our death... and every moment in between. Emotions are not going to go away, and so it is time to develop a realistic and healthy relationship with them.

If you aspire to expand your capacity for Inspirational Leadership, creating resonance in your team is essential. It is not a path for the faint of heart, and it will challenge your thinking and require your own evolution. In the end you can expect greater happiness in both your personal and professional life. You can expect to live from a deeper sense of authenticity and presence and experience more connection with yourself and with everyone in your life.