

3 Reasons We Don't Trust Leaders Who Freak Out



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Quicken's CEO recovers from a disastrous ad with a very candid, "[We screwed up](#)," and is praised, rightly so, for showing his high EQ. Uber's own very EQ-deficient founder admits he needed to work on "[Travis 2.0](#)" while the company works to revamp its own culture and salvage its image. In the meantime, the revolving door of the White House is moving with dizzying speed, and even allies are criticizing its toxic culture, with handlers purportedly in a constant scramble for new ways to to keep their leader calm.

Ever since we learned about [emotional intelligence](#) (EQ), we much prefer leaders who have it. The ideal leader has enough brain space and emotional groundedness to push forward with business goals and stay intensely focused on organizational function. They treat colleagues and employees with the skill and finesse of an experienced therapist, and are authentic, but they never have a meltdown. We want our leaders to *understand* emotions,

but please — don't express them. Now that we know the difference between being emotional and emotionally intelligent, there's no going back. And the reasons are far older than the concept of EQ.

Here's why:

Awareness Equals Power

A leader who is unaware of how others are feeling may be unaware of all sorts of other things too, and therefore caught with their pants down in a crisis. Someone who appears to be blind to their own flaws is also probably blind to their effect on others. Which means at the negotiating table, they may lose everything — and we lose too. If you're in any kind of leadership role, watch what happens when you admit something missed your attention. You'll feel a palpable dip in your influence.

EQ Means You've Done The Work

We love and admire heroes who clearly worked hard to rise above adversity. Every superhero has an origin story about facing their worst fears and struggling to overcome them. I read some candid accounts of executives who had to do just that in *The Melting Point* by Dr. Christian Marcolli. Marcolli is a global performance coach who schools rising execs and Olympic athletes on how to build up intimidating emotional resilience no matter the pressure. Travis, you listening? Cool-headed leaders have likely invested a lot of time and effort to get that way, and we respect them all the more for it.

Emotions Are Antisocial, EQ Is Social

When *New York Times* science reporter Daniel Goleman wrote *Emotional Intelligence* (based on Peter Salovey and John Mayer's original research) back in 1990, he included 4 traits of emotionally intelligent people:

- They're self aware.
- They can manage their emotions.
- They're empathetic to the emotional drives of others,.
- They're skilled at handling other people's emotions.

27 years later, the idea still stands. But as sometimes happens with trending

concepts, we tend to gloss over a key distinction: emotional intelligence is really a social skill. And the ability to manage our own emotions has a social benefit. It helps keep the tribe together — aligned to support a leader we trust. But when your people are united in their mistrust, you've got a new problem.

Managing emotions is not the same as hiding them, either: it turns out that [51% of people have to pretend to be happy at their jobs](#), but that pretense actually makes them 32% more dissatisfied with those jobs. Faking it actually makes it worse. Instead, understand that you may not have been born with a cool head, but you can learn it — and practice and perfect it. Staying calm in the face of a raging mess will leave you in a far better position to gain and keep that rare and human commodity we call trust. More power to you.