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# What's Your Leadership Kryptonite?

*How to Create an Emotionally Mature Leadership Team*

## Executive Summary

Studying the impact that emotional maturity has on leadership development has been a hobby of mine ever since Dr. Daniel Goleman wrote his fine book, *Emotional Intelligence*, in 1995. Dr. Goleman's work captivated my attention, because in 40 years as a leadership consultant I have witnessed firsthand that emotional maturity is a major area of concern for many of our clients.

In addition to practical experience, our research at People First International has confirmed that the discipline of emotional intelligence is one of the greatest challenges many organizations face with regard to addressing gaps in their leadership development. That is why I wanted to write a white paper that would address the major issues concerning emotional maturity, especially as they impact leadership development.

Before we begin, however, I would like to make a confession: I freely admit that I must constantly check my own emotional maturity. I am 67 years old, and yet there are times when my own very immature behavior causes me to wonder ... Will I *ever* grow up emotionally?

I want to be very transparent in this white paper. I am not asserting that you need to develop your emotional maturity because I have "arrived." No! I most certainly have *not* arrived; I know that I am under construction! I believe that those of you who recognize that you too are still under construction will find sound advice here that you will be able to immediately apply to your leadership development. I wanted to write a paper that will help leaders to take a long, serious look at where they are in their own emotional growth. I am well aware that many leaders have not taken the time to do a deep-dive with regard to how their emotional maturity is impacting the growth and development of the people around them.

*Cont'd ...*



## White Paper

There is another point that I want to make clear with regard to the creation of this paper: this is not going to be a white paper written for PhDs. We have two psychologists on our team; however, I have purposefully removed any psychological jargon that might impede the reader's understanding of this material. We like to say that we have "placed the cookies on the bottom shelf" so that everyone can enjoy these intellectual delicacies. The style will be informal and conversational. I truly want to have a heart-to-heart conversation with you, the reader. My desire is to help you to think more deeply about your emotional maturity than ever before.

Let me highlight a couple of important areas that should pique your interest. First, I have created a 20-point self-assessment that will help you examine your own emotional maturity. This is a very insightful emotional intelligence assessment because it juxtaposes emotionally mature behaviors with those that are emotionally immature.

Next, on a very practical level I have developed 10 Steps for Mastering Emotional Maturity.

This material will be an immensely practical guide for every leader who wants a succinct summary of the very best emotional intelligence literature available in an easily digestible, reader-friendly style.

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this. There was a great deal of love that went into putting this paper together. If you will discipline yourself to finish this white paper and apply it, I assure you that it will be worth every minute that you invest in your emotional development. The leaders who have taken this material to heart have assured me that it has been a life-changing experience.

And just in case you believe that I am simply one of those touchy-feely guys who has never struggled with emotional vulnerability, please allow me to dispel that misunderstanding. I am a Kung-Fu Master; the martial arts have been my passion for fifty years. I am a warrior by nature and by training. For this reason, the material you are about to absorb is some of the most difficult teaching I have ever faced in my life. I intend to share my failures with you, as well as my growth in this critical area of leadership development. I hope my transparency will inspire you to face your emotional kryptonite and learn to master your emotional maturity!





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## Introduction

I was an avid comic book reader as a child. One of my favorite characters was Superman, who recently returned to the big screen in *Man of Steel*. I grew up on reruns of George Reeves and the *Adventures of Superman* television series, most of which I watched in black-and-white, and which further cemented my love for all things Superman. I used to pin a towel around my neck and leap out of trees, shouting, "I'm going to stop you, Lex Luthor!"

I was distressed, however, to see how this incredibly powerful Superman could be utterly incapacitated by being exposed to Kryptonite—the glowing, green fragments of Superman's home planet, Krypton. I hated to see someone so strong ("Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings at a single bound!") become so weak in a matter of seconds in the presence of even a marble-sized lump of Kryptonite.

### Leader, let me ask you a question: What is your Kryptonite?

I had moved on from Superman when I began to study Kung Fu at age seventeen, but the principles involved in his story were brought home to me as I sat under the teaching of my grandmaster. He taught me about a weakness that would disable me just as surely as Kryptonite incapacitated Superman. "There is an enemy you will encounter during every confrontation you'll ever have in your life," the grandmaster would say. "The enemy is not the person standing before you; it is the enemy within."

Our teacher was warning us against anger. Everything we did in our classes was designed to teach us that our first objective was not to gain

control over an opponent, but rather to establish control of ourselves. The grandmaster taught us to repeat phrases such as, "Better to rule your temper than rule a city" and "Master your emotions and you will master your opponent."

These lessons came slowly to me at first. My football coaches had taught me that I would not be at my best on the gridiron unless I played with a real fury and hatred for my opponents. But whenever I brought that rage into the ring during our Kung Fu sparring sessions, I would *always* lose. Time and again my grandmaster would remind me that when the emotions take over, you're rationally, logically out of the fight. "Prudent, wise, thoughtful moves, Jack," the grandmaster would say in his soft voice. "Think! Yes, your opponent just scored a clean hit on you, but you must not succumb to anger. Once he has made you angry, you do foolish things."

As the years passed and I advanced through the degrees of black belt mastery in Kung Fu, I came to fully understand that my Kryptonite was my own emotional immaturity—whether I was crouched in the ring wearing a martial arts uniform or sitting in the board room in a three-piece suit. Our grandmaster modeled emotional maturity—some use the phrase emotional intelligence—for our entire class. We would spend hours without practicing a single form or technique: instead we sat in a circle and talked about self-control. "Meekness is not weakness," the grandmaster frequently told us, "but strength under control."

It took me years to fully absorb the lessons, but today I know that I create my own Kryptonite! And I must always be conscious to practice emotional intelligence that will keep that Kryptonite safely locked away.



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## What is Emotional Intelligence?

It is a specific human intelligence that relates to one's self-awareness with regard to his or her emotional state and ability to maintain self-control over emotional highs and lows. Moreover, it is also characterized by adjusting one's emotional state in order to more empathetically respond to the attitudes and actions of others, so that a person creates the most harmonious and healthy outcome for all parties.

In other words, individuals who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are in complete control of their emotional state and are fully aware of how they affect the emotional state of others. They take full responsibility for how they influence the emotions of others and they help others to more effectively manage their own emotional highs and lows.

## Conflict and Corporate Kryptonite

If you live and move in the business world, you've probably recognized that emotional immaturity is Kryptonite for a great many people. How is it with you and your leadership team? We all have Kryptonite locked up inside us. What are you doing with yours? Do you have control over your Kryptonite ... or does it have control over you?

I have worked as a corporate trainer and consultant for forty years. I've worked with Fortune 500 organizations, with small, family-owned businesses, and just about everything in between, in both the for-profit and non-profit arenas. I've met scores of people who clearly don't realize that a conspicuous lack of emotional intelligence is their own brightly glowing green Kryptonite. In fact, I will state here that emotional immaturity is one of the most disempowering character flaws for many people in the business world.

That immaturity is brought out into the light by one very simple question: **How do you do at managing conflict?** Emotional maturity welcomes conflict as an opportunity to practice humility and grace. For years, I have urged my clients to understand that conflict is *not* a negative experience:

1. If it is handled in a manner consistent with common purpose and shared principles, and
2. If conducted in a way that clearly demonstrates the utmost dignity, respect, and honor.

As leaders in our homes and businesses, we should see conflict as a positive leverage point for encouraging innovation and building common commitment and agreement. That's one reason why all of us at People First International never use the word "employees." Instead we refer to everyone on our team as **purpose partners**, because we are united by a common purpose and bold vision for the future. If we're going to develop and maintain a passionate commitment to common purpose in our organizations, we leaders must be able to model emotional maturity.

## Emotional Immaturity

Let's give some thought to the emotional traits of young children. We all remember the impulsiveness that was part of our childhood; those of us who are parents also recall the behaviors of our own children. If you visit a pre-K class or volunteer in your church's nursery, you see a marked lack of people skills exhibited by most young children. But unless a child is overtly aggressive or unusually withdrawn, we don't pay too much attention, because we simply don't expect toddlers and small children to exhibit wise, personable behaviors.

We have entirely different expectations for adults. We don't expect a 30-year-old to throw temper tantrums. We would be greatly concerned for the emotional well-being of a 40-year-old who began to throw things or scream in frustration. We expect adults to manage their emotions maturely and assume that they will work to eliminate childish behaviors from their lives.

It may be that we assume too much! During my teenage years, I became more conscious of the acrimonious interaction between my grandparents, who were both in their eighties. I would watch them arguing with each other, one often provoking the other even when the spat seemed entirely avoidable. It began to dawn on me that chronological age isn't always indicative of maturity. Just because you're now in your twenties, have made middle age, or even have moved toward becoming a senior adult ... that doesn't necessarily mean you've matured!

Let's look at the emotional traits of children and compare them with adult behaviors.



## How Is Your Emotional Maturity?

### CHILDREN

### MATURE ADULTS

(1) Are selfish. It's all about ME, not about WE. A child must be the center of attention. This is one of the main symptoms of emotional immaturity: being "ME-centered."	(1) Are selfless. They are others-centered. They live by the adage, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." Therefore, they honor others by treating them with respect and dignity.
(2) Are characterized by self-absorption	(2) Are characterized by humility
(3) Throw tantrums. "Poor ME!" they shout. Why don't you understand ME?"	(3) Remain calm. "Teach me," they say. "Help me understand you, your point of view, and my shortcomings."
(4) Aggravate a confrontation. They attack OR go "emotionally absent" OR immediately apologize in an attempt to placate the other party. This feigned humility usually transforms into resentment, resistance, and even revenge.	(4) Defuse a confrontation. They recognize that without the right to disagree, agreement is meaningless, so they work to develop conflict resolution skills. Mature adults initiate constructive, solution-centered dialogue.
(5) Are impatient	(5) Are long-suffering
(6) Are poor listeners	(6) Practice others-centered, non-interruptive listening
(7) Display little or no interest in others—they are prisoners of their own self-importance	(7) See others as possessing exalted worth, exalted dignity, and exalted potential. They value, honor and esteem others.
(8) Refuse to own any part of a problem because "It's not my fault!"	(8) Take ownership of a problem and act as a responsible, proactive solution-seeker
(9) Have little or no attention span	(9) Are very attentive to how they come across to others with regard to their tone of voice, words, and body language. They are also alert for the verbal and non-verbal clues of others.
(10) Have little desire to develop social graces	(10) Consciously work to develop social graces
(11) Show little or no empathy for others	(11) Are quick to pick up on the emotional cues of others and to adjust their emotional state to empathize with others.
(12) Don't manage their own emotions well	(12) Suspend judgment and emotion.
(13) Are focused on their feelings	(13) Operate from logic and emotional intelligence
(14) Tend to be critical and competitive, and combative	(14) Strive to be complimentary, collaborative, and conciliatory
(15) Display little or no self-awareness. They don't realize when they have dishonored, devalued, or disrespected others.	(15) Are alert to the verbal and non-verbal clues given by others. Therefore, they know immediately when and how they have dishonored, devalued, or disrespected someone.
(16) Don't take ownership for their role in relational breakdowns. Since it is always the other person's fault, they will not explore how they might improve their relationship with the other party.	(16) Take ownership of a problem and seek solutions. They ask what they have done to increase tension. They work to move the other person from an adversarial relationship into an advocacy relationship.
(17) Require high emotional maintenance. They respond badly to criticism or any corrective action. Moreover, they make other people responsible for their emotional state.	(17) Manage their emotions. They aren't afraid to ask another, "Please show me my blind spots. Hence, they welcome any and all constructive feedback, because they have an abiding desire to increase their emotional intelligence.
(18) Wear their feelings on their sleeve	(18) Are self-controlled and remain calm in the midst of the emotional tirades and vacuous bravado of others—they are emotionally stable
(19) Are easily offended	(19) Are quick to overlook a perceived offense
(20) Believe that people exist for them. They see others as a vehicle for self-referencing and self-validation. They look for opportunities to control others.	(20) Believe that they exist to honor, encourage and bring out the best in others. They look for opportunities to edify, celebrate, and serve others.



As you read down the left-hand, “childlike” side of the chart, you probably spotted qualities that are displayed by some adults with whom you live and work. Do you recognize any traits of your own?

Let me speak the truth in love: those who display these attitudes and actions don’t serve themselves well, nor do they serve anyone in their lives well. People who exhibit the behaviors described in the left-hand column demonstrate that their emotions are not trustworthy. They’re highly unstable, like bottles of the Civil War-era nitroglycerine; even the slightest jostling may cause them to explode.

Added to this volatile emotional mix is the child’s firm belief that “There’s nothing wrong with me or the way I’m speaking to you.” When it comes to conflict resolution, the child is convinced that “This misunderstanding is *your* fault!” Granted, they may not *say* that! They may quickly retreat from conflict or immediately apologize. But when confronted with conflict, most children become very defensive, and the mindset invariably is that they are blameless. “*You* said this!” they’ll hiss. “*You* did that!”

A child possesses no logical, rational people skills for processing anger and managing conflict. There is no cognitive activity; the event remains mired in the emotional state. Logic leaves for lunch and reason lurches into the restroom. The immature person becomes *emotionally absent*; in other words, they refuse to take any responsibility for managing their emotions and the emotions of the other person.

### Emotional Intelligence and its Relationship to Trust and Respect

There is a direct correlation between a person’s level of emotional intelligence and the level of trust and respect that they are able to engender. It logically follows then, that a person with a very low emotional intelligence quotient will not be able to create a high degree of trust and respect in their relationships or compete with a person who has a high degree of emotional intelligence. Here are some ancient proverbs which discuss the wisdom of applying emotional intelligence:

- A fool is quick-tempered; a wise man stays cool when insulted.
- A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.
- A short-tempered man must bear his own penalty; you can’t do much to help him. If you try once you must try a dozen times!
- Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

### How Mature is Your Leadership Team?



Generally speaking, an organization’s top leadership team is chock-full of powerful personalities. Most or all members of a good leadership team have reached their position because they are confident, self-assured, and bold. And there is nothing wrong with that! But we all must be careful that the very boldness that brought us to our place at the leadership table doesn’t become a bludgeon that shuts other people down.

All of us who are in leadership must be aware of the power of our personalities. I have spent years working to develop a fearless and courageous spirit; I couldn’t get up on stage in front of thousands of people if my spirit was full of timidity and doubt. Moreover, I would have never been invited to train the U.S. Marines in lethal hand-to-hand combat at camp Lejeune in 2006 if I lacked confidence in my martial arts abilities. But when I am dealing one-on-one with my family, friends, clients, and purpose partners at People First International, I must take great care to present myself as a leader who wants to care and develop, rather than as an alpha-male who wants to control and dominate.



Each of us must develop an awareness about the power of our own personality so that we don't throw the kill switch in someone else's human spirit—which is easy to do! Some people (especially children) will absorb a single harsh word or phrase, which echoes in their minds and creates great emotional distress and even resentment. If you and I don't develop self-awareness—if we lack emotional intelligence—we will build barriers between us and others rather than build bridges to others!

### Setting the Example; Leaders Growing Together

In all the books I've read about leadership, perhaps the single most important word contained in those volumes is *example*. As



the leader of an executive team, the one thing you want all your leaders to be is examples of emotional maturity. Again, let me repeat that there is nothing wrong with manifesting a bold, courageous personality. Leaders need those qualities if we are going to realize our bold, courageous goals! But we must balance that powerful persona with emotional intelligence—that is, a mature level of self-awareness that allows us to “dial it back” and not overrun people.

The mature leader is humble. Humility is attractive; humility gains followers and encourages loyalty. The immature leader is overcome by *hubris*, which is defined as excessive arrogance. Hubris is unattractive; it repels (because it exalts self and devalues others) and produces resentment, resistance, and revenge. Therefore, if there is a person on the leadership team who is characterized by excessive arrogance, they can easily deliver the death blow to the levels of trust and respect that they have established with other members of that team.

When people are growing in humility, the leadership team exhibits a high degree of openness, vulnerability, and transparency, which

invariably guards against any mistrust and disrespect. As the team grows in their trust and respect for one another, they will frankly admit the areas, both personal and professional, where they need to develop and grow. The members will become living examples of emotional intelligence.

All the members of your leadership team must support one another and hold each other accountable with regard to each other's emotional growth. They should exhort each other, “Let's work together to get better at these things!” Individually we must consciously, intentionally work to move away from hubris and toward humility. So we're growing in emotional intelligence individually and as a team so that we develop deeper trust and respect for one another. For without high trust and high respect, there is no relationship and no potential for an organization to create sustainable profitability. There's never a point where we have “arrived.” This is a philosophy we never grow out of; we only grow deeper in it. Hence, we must maintain a constant vigilance over our hubristic Kryptonite.

### Building Bridges

I will frankly admit that I can easily slide into many of the immature behaviors listed in the left-hand column of the chart. I still teach and practice Kung Fu. I have competed against tough opponents for decades. I am a fighter at heart. I know how to wait ... and watch for an opening ... and then to *attack* with all my focused energy. So when I find myself in interpersonal conflict, I have to consciously resist my instinct to attack. I remind myself to wait ... and *think* ... and remember that I can't control the other person's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behavior. The only thing I *can* control is my own emotions. Then I ask myself three questions:

1. **What did I do**—in the way I spoke or the way I reacted emotionally—to incite a negative response?
2. **What can I own** in reference to the conflict?
3. **What can I do** to defuse the conflict?

And once I've considered these three questions, I do not attack, nor do I withdraw; instead I *engage* and look to build bridges of trust and respect.





The mature leader keeps the Kryptonite tightly locked in a lead-lined box. He or she will guard against any emotional outbursts and begin a constructive, caring dialogue, working to develop others into purpose partners. Emotional maturity pictures two people who had been sitting at opposite ends of a table moving the table aside and sitting down together side-by-side.

The mature person possesses the humility to ask the other person to show them their blind spots. So dialogue might go something like this:

John: "Bill, clearly there's a rift in this conversation we're having. I take full responsibility for my part in creating this tension. I value our relationship a great deal and I don't want to create any barriers of mistrust or misunderstanding. Please help me understand how I have devalued, disrespected, or irritated you. I hope you'll speak the truth in love to me, but *please* speak the truth!"

It's essential that John be sincere; must not be applying a technique intended to manipulate Bill into surrendering to John's way of thinking. John's goal *must* be to earn Bill's trust and respect and move him from an adversarial position into collaborative advocacy. He is saying, "Help me mend any erosion of trust and be a better friend to you. Teach me, Bill. Show me what I've done to create tension in our relationship. Educate me about the areas where I need to improve."

If an exchange is growing heated, the mature person works through an internal reasoning process that would sound very much like this:

*I recognize that I'm getting angry. Why? Am I part of the problem here? Am I angry because this person is pushing an emotional hot button in my psyche that carries old baggage? If so, I have to be careful; I can easily move into devaluing, disrespecting, and dishonoring. Those are my natural defense mechanisms: to go on the attack or to go emotionally absent.*

### "I Always See Both Points of View ..."

Our natural, human reaction to conflict was drolly expressed by an anonymous poet:

*In matters controversial  
my perception's rather fine*

*I always see both points of view:  
the one that's wrong and mine.*

"You think *I'm* wrong?" our ego fumes. "You find *me* irritating?! I'll make sure you know how foolish and disgusting *you* are!" That's our Kryptonite; that is the reasoning of a child. An emotionally mature person recognizes this tendency and firmly rejects it. Emotional maturity is best characterized by a person taking the initiative to show others that they want to increase likability and trust through an intentional display of complete transparency, vulnerability, and disclosure.

"OK," you may be wondering, "but what if it isn't my fault? What if I *am* being mature and the person I'm dealing with is behaving like a child—attacking and blaming?" That's an excellent question, because we do find ourselves trying to resolve conflict with people who are not displaying any emotional maturity.

Let's say you're in a tense situation and you perceive that even though you're trying to work toward a solution, the other person seems determined that there is going to be a problem—and the problem is your fault! Is this the time to "stand tall" and put the other party in their place? No! You *lead*. You lead by being the bigger person; you engage and take the initiative to work toward resolution. Demonstrate your emotional maturity by being more humble, more patient, and more understanding.

You be the magnanimous one—one who is gracious, generous, and forgiving. The Latin roots from which we get our English word "magnanimous" are *magna*, meaning "great," and *animus*, meaning "soul." So the idea behind *magnanimous* is the meaning *great soul*—in other words, a mature soul or mature person.

### So ... Do I Just Run Up the White Flag?

You may be wondering if I am suggesting that, if caught in conflict, you should simply run up the white "surrender" flag? I certainly am not! You may recall that #4 on the Emotional Maturity chart reads, in part: **Maturity recognizes that without the right to disagree, agreement is meaningless.**



So then how can we disagree without being disagreeable? We do it by modeling grace in handling a conflict. If another adult is behaving



badly, as I have already stated, you strive to be the bigger person. Let your family, friends, and coworkers see what humility and grace look like with skin on. Model these magnanimous qualities for everyone with whom you live and work.

When conflict flares up, I can succumb to childish immaturity and let the whole world know I'm offended and upset because I'm not getting my way ... *or* I can consider the other person's viewpoint and really practice my people skills. I have actually caught myself in the middle of a heated conversation and produced a little smile and thought, *It's not often that I get this upset, and I've never seen this person so upset! Wow! What a great opportunity for us both to grow!*

The greatest growth in our lives springs from the fertile soil of the greatest adversarial event; the greater the conflict, the greater the growth opportunity! It's an opportunity to get better at handling greater conflict. **True quality is the quality of every quality at its highest testing point.** If there is no test, there is no opportunity for us to display growth in maturity, humility, and grace.

An invaluable lesson I've learned as a public speaker is enlisting others rather than confronting them. I must confess that the first time someone called me out in front of an audience and insisted that I didn't know what I was talking about, I was highly offended! I immediately became very defensive and felt like my role was to push back *hard* and put that ignoramus in his place. Of course, all I did was create an enemy. I failed the test!

After that experience, I learned to welcome the malcontent, because I realized that he or she is gift wrapping a golden opportunity for me to practice everything I preach in front of a group! Today, if I'm confronted in a public setting, my immediate response is to sincerely thank the one who's confronting me. I'll smile and say, "Thank you so much for your openness!"

I then seize on what we can agree on. "You know, what you said about me being full of myself? That's a good observation! I agree with you! And so does my wife!" The joke will ease any tension in the room. Then I'll continue, "I'm just so excited that we've created enough trust in our group and that we have such a safe space that you feel comfortable to challenge me in front of everyone here!" I'll turn to the group with a big smile: "I think we all ought to give this person a standing ovation!"

After the applause has died down, I'll say to my new friend, "I can really learn from what you just said and I welcome every opportunity to learn. Let's have coffee when this is done, OK?"

I've grown better at managing myself. I don't single that person out and begin thinking of him as "Someone I Don't Like." My role is to display my philosophy and show the group what love, joy, peace, patience, grace, understanding, and humility look like with skin on. When I'm confronted by someone who is *not* being gracious and *not* showing love, I must remember that this person is acting from a child's platform. He's not demonstrating that there's some lack of worth in me; he's simply proving that he's been disabled by his own Kryptonite!

### Build Bridges, Not Barriers!

Faced with interpersonal conflict, a child will behave in one of two ways: attack or withdraw. Perhaps it's a mild expression of the so-called "fight or flight" response that psychologists claim is part of our physiological makeup. As I've said, we expect such behavior from children and excuse it; but an adult who fights or flies is not exhibiting mature behavior. I'm afraid there's just no other way to say it!



A friend I respect uses a phrase that reminds me to maintain control over my emotions: “We’re all one step away from Stupid.” Any of us can succumb to our crippling emotional Kryptonite at any time. The



people who are closest to you know if you possess these traits. And the *last* thing you want those people to think of you is, “Oh, that’s just Jack. He’s never learned to manage his emotions; if he’s upset, he wants the whole world to know it.”

We need people around us whom we’ve invited into our lives to show us our blind spots, and we must be willing to listen—humbly and respectfully—and take the necessary steps to change. I love Jack Nicholson’s line from the climactic courtroom scene in *A Few Good Men*: “You can’t handle the truth!” That makes for great drama, but you and I had better be able to absorb the truth and make the necessary corrections! If my closest friends think I look like a two-year-old, it’s most likely because I’m behaving like a two-year old!

## The Relationship Between Choice and Responsibility

One of the most critical areas for growing in emotional maturity is to gain a deeper understanding into the meaning behind the word responsibility and its connection to our choices.

You have the personal power to *choose* your response. Getting upset or remaining calm is a choice. No one can upset you ... unless you choose to allow them to do so. Take responsibility for your emotional condition.

Let’s look at the word *responsibility*. If you break it into two distinct (but not separate) words—*response* and *ability*—you will fully grasp the significance of the word. The first idea that we

come to is “response,” which signifies on a very deep philosophical level that all of life demands a response on our part. It has been well said that 10% of life consists of what happens to us and the other 90% is made up of our response to it. That 90% is what makes us or breaks us. At every turn in life we face a specific set of circumstances; some of those circumstances may be very unpleasant. However, those circumstances are *not* what build us up or destroy us in and of themselves. The outcome is solely dependent on our *response* to those circumstances. Our personal response—a response that we choose—is what determines our emotional outcome. We are *responsible* for that particular outcome.

Now let’s examine the second idea contained in the word responsibility: “Ability” is the corollary of the word *response* that we just examined. Ability carries the connotation that a person is in possession of a certain power, skill, or proficiency to carry out a particular task. Therefore, you have the *ability* to personally decide what your *response* will be to every situation.

This enlightened understanding of the word *responsibility*—when you see it as response/ability—should keep us from abdicating our personal power of choice to other people and to any situations that arise in our lives. In other words, the more we logically, intelligently, and intentionally decide that people and situations will *not* be the sole source and cause of our personal responses and reactions to various situations, the more we will understand that *the only one who has power and control over our responses is us!*

Situations and people don’t dictate our responses. This knowledge empowers us to maintain control over our emotions, regardless of how frustrating or volatile a situation may become. That is why we should never say, “You made me feel this way!” We are solely responsible for how we feel—people and circumstances do not have that control over us.

If you are happy or sad, you are responsible for your own emotional well-being! If you catch yourself saying things like, “I’m unhappy because



so-and-so did this” or “I’m angry because such-and-such happened to me,” let me encourage you to stop it! Don’t make other people responsible for how you feel; I promise you that you will live a *much* happier life.

The bottom line of this final point is that whatever you are currently experiencing in your life at this very moment, especially if it is not the best of situations, is giving you a golden opportunity to *choose* to exercise your ability to respond to it in the wisest manner possible, so that you will become a stronger person as a result. And, as an added benefit, others will be inspired by your wise, humble, uncomplaining response to your challenging situation.

### Are You Building Your Brand? Or Damaging It?



If you do any kind of work in sales or marketing, you’re aware of the concept of building the organization’s brand. Have you ever considered the idea that each of us, whether we are doing it consciously or not, is building our own brand? **Each time another person has any interpersonal contact with us, we are marketing our own brand.** Each time someone meets us for the first time, they are actively considering two questions:

- “Do I like this person?”
- “Can I trust this person?”

If the initial answers to these two questions are “Yes,” then more questions immediately begin to percolate. **“Is this person worthy of my respect?”** And, in the professional setting, **“Do I want to do business with this person?”**

The two columns on the Emotional Maturity chart provide us with a choice. If we display any of the childish immaturity described in the left-hand column, those behaviors will inevitably create barriers in our relationships and damage our personal brand. Those who meet us will answer their four internal questions with a resounding “No.” Childish behaviors do not build bridges of trust and respect, nor are they neutral. You *will* create distrust and disrespect.

The very nature of human interactions, because we all have different ideas and different perspectives on life, produces conflict. It’s an inevitable part of the human condition; we’re going to “rub each other the wrong way.” So when the temperature in a room starts to rise, the words of my grandmaster should be at the forefront of your mind: “The enemy is not the person standing before you; it is the enemy within.”

Just as Superman was incapacitated by a chunk of Kryptonite, emotional immaturity can reduce you and me to the point where we are no good to anyone. We must not succumb to our own emotional Kryptonite; don’t allow conflict to put you in a “fight or flight” mindset. Be patient, be long-suffering, be forgiving, be magnanimous ... be a leader! Don’t let conflict hurt your relationships when you can use conflict to strengthen them!

### 10 Steps for Mastering Emotional Maturity

**(1) Seek out the best wisdom literature and establish a philosophy of life that coheres to unchanging truth.** We all need objective, unwavering truth and wisdom to stabilize our minds and emotions in this unstable world. The first step in mastering emotional maturity is to find the most reliable source of truth and wisdom, one that will extricate your mind from a sea of internal and external subjectivism and enable you to think objectively about your life and how to live it. This stable source of truth will protect you from those wide emotional swings, ranging from ecstasy to depression, and keep you from being a slave to your emotional highs and lows.





So find your Logos of Life—that is, develop solid, epistemological self-consciousness—and become rooted and grounded in truth.

**(2) Seek out and establish an ongoing relationship with a wise, emotionally mature mentor.**

Once you have established the best source of objective truth (Step One), the logical next step is to seek out someone who consistently and self-consciously models that source of truth. This person should be someone who operates from the same epistemological basis that you do.

We all need living models and wise mentors of emotional intelligence. We need to know what emotional maturity looks like, sounds like, and behaves like. Who is the most emotionally mature person that you know? If you truly want to master your own emotional maturity, be on the lookout for people who have mastered their own emotional intelligence and consistently display that maturity. Be observant of people who share your same philosophical foundation, people who display integrity, good character, and genuine humility. Be on the lookout for people who impress you with their wisdom and self-control when they are confronted with an emotionally volatile situation.

While we all need to engage with living models of truth, wisdom, and excellence, history provides us with wonderful models of personal and professional excellence. In addition to your mentoring relationship, fill your library with biographies and become a student of the best historical models of emotional maturity.

**(3) Discover your blind spots and ask for help with regard to your emotional growth.**

One of the major indicators of emotional growth is someone who is willing to perform an unflinching inventory in order to discover their



own gaps (that is, areas which need further development) in emotional maturity *and ask*

*someone to help them with that growth.* If we are to advance in emotional maturity, we must have someone we love, trust, and respect, with whom we can be vulnerable and open, and who will help us uncover and frankly discuss our blind spots.

You have blind spots ... I have blind spots ... We all have them! And if you don't seek feedback with regard to your own blind spots, you're never going to grow. I would hope that your relationship with your mentor (Step Two) would be such that this person would become your accountability partner. But I've known people who have reached out to their spouse or to a trusted friend to fill this room. Whomever you choose, the accountability relationship should be marked by feedback, openness, transparency, disclosure, and vulnerability. These words are the gateway to emotional maturity.

Recognition is the first step to treatment and cure. Many of us *believe* that we are emotionally mature ... but we aren't. If we ever get to the point where we believe we've "arrived" at this, we're really in trouble. It is incredibly easy to slip back into emotional immaturity and become prideful and selfish. We have blind spots! We need someone who will speak the truth in love to us,

**(4) Recognize your emotional triggers that disengage your mind and cause you to react without thinking.**

We all have things that we don't handle well emotionally. Someone says something to us which, in their minds, is perfectly mild and innocuous, and we react badly. The other person is understandably confused and annoyed.

What sets you off? Ask your mentor, trusted friends, and loved ones to show you the emotional "hot spots" that cause you to react harshly or angrily. Years of experience have taught me that this is a big issue with a lot of people. There are a great many people who have been treated very badly at some point in their lives; they've come through that difficult experience and they're no longer a victim; but even today, a harsh word will press an emotional trigger which can, unwittingly, produce a knee-jerk, negative response. They respond all out of proportion to what was said



because the emotional trigger releases a host of deep-seated past feelings of anger, resentment or insecurity. They fear that they are going to be abused or taken advantage of again. Therefore, their emotionally charged, defensive posture can appear to be very irrational. But once you know that you have stepped on one of their emotional land mines, their disproportionate response makes perfect sense.

I've known many high-powered executives who, if they believe someone is challenging their authority (it may be nothing more than the person asking a question or offering an alternative solution), that innocent question or suggestion may press an emotional trigger and they suddenly exhibit aggressive, overbearing behaviors and put the other person down ... often without realizing what they're doing. Their imperious behavior is often compensating for something unpleasant that happened to them early in their career.

Many of us are not even aware of what our hot spots are, which is why we need to ask for help. Some people go through their entire lives without ever identifying their emotional triggers. You and I must be willing to do a deep dive into what causes our minds to disengage and react without thought. This step can be liberating with regard to setting you free from those hidden emotional triggers that are inadvertently producing disempowering responses in your life that are not serving you or others well.

#### **(5) Let your thought and speech be governed by graciousness and gentleness.**

One of the greatest clues with regard to assessing how emotionally mature a person is pertains to how well a person can control their tongue, especially when someone has treated them in a very dishonoring, disrespectful, or undignified manner.

In other words, if a person does not resort to intemperate speech, recalcitrant or sullen

behavior, and maintains their mental peace and harmony in the midst of an emotionally charged and disagreeable situation, then they have a very high level of emotional intelligence.

Contrariwise, an emotionally immature person—when they perceive that they are being treated poorly, even in the context of mild provocation (whether real or imagined)—will immediately lose control over their emotions. They will jump in the center of the emotional free-for-all with a childish, irrational, defensive posture, coupled



with blame-and-shame inflammatory rhetoric, and usually exacerbate the incivility of the situation. The emotionally immature person is often totally unaware that many times they are the cause of the consternation.

One of the most important ways to start mastering your emotional maturity is to begin meditating on the seriousness of the impact that your words have on people's lives. A single word has the inherent power of life or death within it. Words have that kind of power because they are the creators and change agents of life. Hence, if you want to change your life, then change your language, because your words are not a part of your life; they are the very center and circumference of the essence of your life.

Consequently, some of the most important words that you will ever hear are the words that you say to yourself.



If you were to write down all of the words that you have said to the people that you lead within your organization over the last year, what percentage would fall into the category of gracious and gentle words, and what percentage of your words would be considered harsh and thoughtless? This should be a very sobering question for a thoughtful and caring leader.

I implore you, if you genuinely want to grow your emotional intelligence by leaps and bounds, then start today and ask yourself these questions after every conversation:

Did my words have a negative or positive impact on that person? Are my words uplifting or discouraging? Have I witnessed a visible change in people's countenances after I speak to them? Do I intentionally use words to edify people? Moreover, do I more thoughtfully use words that I know will elicit a favorable response and watch for a positive change in the person's demeanor?

It is a sad fact that not enough leaders seriously think about what they say before they say it. That is the root cause for so much discontent and disengagement in the workplace, because leaders are not assuming any responsibility for the consequences of the words that they use with their team members.

What would happen to the quality of the engagement, productivity, customer satisfaction, and financial results if every leader in your organization would more intentionally think about how they want their words to be more gracious, gentle, inspiring, enriching, and encouraging to everyone they interact with? Don't you believe that it would dramatically influence the happiness of your organizational culture? Moreover, it would demonstrate to everyone in your organization that this is how an emotionally mature leadership team behaves with regard to how disciplined they are over the control of their tongues.

Thus, the words that cascade from the lips of an emotionally mature leadership team are not governed by their gut, but by grace. That is because they have control over their emotions;

their emotions don't have control over them.

The use of gracious and gentle words are an endangered species today among leadership teams. If you find a person who has disciplined their tongue not to use vulgar, harsh, or indelicate words, then this individual is a very rare person. You should endeavor to model the graciousness and gentleness of their thought and speech.

**(6) Seize every opportunity to be an authentic, empathetic leader.**



You've established your philosophy of objective truth and wisdom; you've established a trust-based relationship with a model and mentor; you've reached the point where you're comfortable to create real accountability with another person; and you are actively working to uncover your blind spots and emotional triggers. You're making so much progress! You are climbing the stairs, moving in a progression of growth in emotional maturity. Now it's time to get serious about looking outside yourself and seizing every opportunity to practice emotional maturity in your personal and professional relationships.

Become a model of emotional maturity so that when other people meet you they will instantaneously pick up on your genuine desire to emotionally connect with them. Let everyone know by your heart-felt behavior that you are a person who is quick to sympathize, empathize (when possible), and apologize. If you're not normally into investing in the emotional well-being of others—if making those emotional deposits





is not currently part of your awareness—this presents a golden opportunity for you to grow.

At the heart of the growth in emotional maturity, is the realization that we are all sentient beings; we are emotional, we're sensitive. Be quick to sympathize with others' experiences; and if what they are describing is part of your own experience, be quick to empathize. Finally, be quick to apologize; this is an enormous part of your own emotional maturity. When you see how you have offended someone or been dismissive of their feelings, be quick to sincerely say, "I'm sorry, I was wrong. Please forgive me." Always be willing to be the first person to fall on the sword.

Learn to be emotionally *present* with people, rather than emotionally absent. Do *not* emotionally withdraw, jump right in and seize that opportunity to *feel*. Feel the pain, sorrow, and frustration of others; on the flip side of the coin, be quick to join in sincerely celebrating others' joy.

#### **(7) Acknowledge your contribution to others' frustration.**

This is taking apology to the next level. What can you own with regard to your part in creating conflicts and frustrations in your interaction with others? Once again, this is an important step toward your growth, as you assess how your current emotional immaturity impacts different situations. Thus, the essence of emotional maturity is all about developing a heightened awareness concerning how your words, your tone of voice, and body language are contributing to your interpersonal conflicts.

A person who is growing in emotional maturity will sense when tension is starting to choke a personal or professional interaction. At that point, they will say something like, "I feel like we've just turned a corner in this conversation; we're moving toward an impasse. We're both digging in our heels, and I can see that this is not profitable for either of us."

You're thinking "This person is clearly upset; what have I done to contribute to causing it?" At that point, you should ask yourself, "What can I own with regard to my part in creating conflict and

frustration in this conversation?" That's a question that a person who is growing in emotional maturity should ask ... and answer.

The person who is growing in emotional maturity will be the bigger person and say to the other party, "First of all, I want to acknowledge my part in creating this frustration, and right now I want to own my part in this conflict. I apologize for saying anything that offended or irritated you. That wasn't my intent, but that's how it turned out. Here's the thing: our relationship is much more important to me than me being right. Could we start all over again? I promise that I'll try my best not to do it again! Better still, tell me what I do that's upsetting to you. Help me see how what I say—or how I say it—is frustrating to you."

**(8) Help amplify the emotions of others as a catharsis for them.** As I said before, as we grow in emotional maturity, we will strive to be the bigger person! Let the other person fully and freely feed back to you what they're feeling. There will be times when the offended person doesn't fully understand the depth of the emotion involved. Perhaps you've unwittingly pressed one of *their* emotional triggers.

Your goal is to make sure that there are no loose ends. When a doctor is treating a wound, he or she must make absolutely sure to clean out every last speck of infection. There can't be any bacteria left behind in the wound. In the same way, when you're in an emotionally heated situation, you want to be the bigger person and make sure to clean out every last speck of tension and resentment.

The wisdom literature teaches that the wounds of a friend are faithful. So whether you're actually asking the other person—whether they are your friend or not—to wound you more! This is really taking your life into the realm of emotional maturity, because you're doing something that is very unnatural. Our natural human reaction is to immediately begin to furiously consider all the faults, foibles, and folly of the other party. We build an enormous wall of reasons why the other person is immature.





As an emotionally mature person, you will allow the other person to talk, to express their frustrations, and to tell you how you have hurt them. You will help to heal the hurt by actually feeding back to the other person the depths of how much you have hurt them by saying things like, “If I were you, I would feel the same way. I’m sure I would feel resentful also.” That’s what I mean by the word *amplify*. Help the other person to get in touch with their own emotions. Allow them to explore their pain and frankly discuss your contribution to that pain. Your goal is to identify with the other person and really consider their point of view. You should even go as far as asking, “Is there anything else you’d like to say? Is there something we haven’t covered yet?”

Think of yourself sitting across the table from another person. Mentally, your body is still on the other side of the table, but your spirit has gotten out of your chair and moved across the table. You’re on the other side of the room now, right next to the other person, with your arm around their shoulders, even as they sit looking at your body across the table. The more time you invest in exploring all of the possible feelings that they may have associated with the pain they believe you caused, the more that person begins to realize that you genuinely care about how they feel. The other person will recognize that you are doing everything in your power to help them return to a state of peace and emotional harmony.

Emotionally immature people cannot and will not do this. Amplifying the emotions of others is altruism at its best. This is the outliving of the ancient teaching, “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.” It is the practice of that exalted philosophy.

**(9) Don’t save emotional stamps; keep short accounts with everyone.** Those who have read our *People First Strategic Leadership* manual will recall our discussion about “stamp-saving.” Far too many men and women resemble the savers of S&H Green Stamps in the 1960s and 70s. When these individuals feel they have been slighted or wronged, they say nothing; however, they add

a stamp to their collectors’ book of affronts and insults. Then, one day, the final slight (either real or imagined) occurs, and the stamp saver’s book is full. BOOM! It’s redemption day, and they cash in all the stamps. Months or years of simmering anger explodes, often over a relatively minor issue.

An emotionally immature person keeps a detailed account of all grievances. They are like emotional librarians; for each person they know, they’ve kept a detailed record of all the offenses they’ve committed. There are times when someone will detonate right in front of our eyes, and we don’t realize why their reaction is so out of proportion. It’s because that person has been filling their emotional stamp book! To mix metaphors, all of their negative feelings have been simmering and boiling over in their soul for months or years. The last offense raised their internal temperature to the level that caused the pot to boil over.

On the other hand, an emotionally mature person will deal with an offense right then and there. They keep short accounts. They display their maturity by determining to discuss tensions in a non-critical, non-confrontational manner. “I don’t want resentment or resistance to build up between us,” the emotionally mature person will say. They understand the importance of keeping short accounts in their close relationships; they’ll check in and ask, “Are we doing OK?” They create an environment in which both parties have permission to immediately address any perceived misconduct. They will come right out and say that their feelings have been hurt *at the time*; they will not wait weeks, months, or even years before they address interpersonal issues.

**(10) Don’t engage in gossip. Go directly to the person who has offended you and speak the truth in love.** Step Ten goes hand-in-hand with keeping short accounts. An





immature stamp-saver will frequently share their list of grievances with virtually everyone except the person whose name is on the cover of the book. It goes without saying that personal and professional relationships may be irrevocably destroyed when an offended party is saying disrespectful, demeaning, dishonoring things about another person behind their back.

The emotionally mature person will promptly go directly to the person who has offended them and speak to them privately. If speaking the truth in love doesn't work, they will enlist another person to go back with them and try again. Everything they do is aimed directly at the reconciliation of the relationship, and they will say so. They'll state right up front that they are working to restore trust and respect between both parties. So you want to have mutual respect and honor.



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