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Title page

Title: "Leading from the heart"

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6 In the 17th century, René Descartes coined his now famous aphorism "Cogito, ergo sum"
7 (I think, therefore I am), a profound hymn to positivism and humanism after centuries of
8 intellectual darkness and cultural decline in the Middle Ages; a hopeful voice of reason after a
9 prolonged period of bowing to superstition, sorcery, and propaganda. Until the 1980s, many
10 psychologists overwhelmingly theorized that "feelings and emotions interfered with sound
11 judgement" ¹ but have we taken, perhaps, the Renaissance's teachings too close to heart? (pun
12 intended here). Mark Crowley, the author of the textbook "Lead from the heart," ² remarks that
13 "...the word "heart" has traditionally conveyed soft, weak, and ineffective management ³...". This
14 might explain the scarcity of information or scholarly work about the interface between emotion
15 and leadership. The influential journal, *The Leadership Quarterly*, ⁴ only recently dedicated an
16 issue to that topic, mainly to acknowledge the lack of evidence base in this field (who would have
17 thought emotion and leadership go hand-in-hand?).
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23 Many of us were raised and nurtured with phrases like: "don't be too emotional,"
24 "emotion will blur your judgment," "keep a clear head when you make decisions," "he is pretty
25 much level-headed, he will make a good leader," and "don't cry, they will see you." Does this ring
26 a bell? If it does, perhaps we should not all look or sound so surprised next time we speak about
27 a whopping mental health crisis in the general population. Chronically suppressing emotion
28 leaves us incapable of managing it effectively in our personal or professional lives. This is because
29 many of us were taught (at home, at school, at work) to "bottle it in," to not talk about feelings
30 or not show emotions so that we can be accepted as strong, impartial individuals, as leaders.
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35 Thankfully, we are slowly but steadily moving away from this phase of denial of something
36 so closely connected to our humanity. We have many agencies and people to thank for this,
37 including academics, researchers and published authors, ⁵⁻⁸ but more work needs to be done to
38 shift the culture of guilt when it comes to celebrating our emotions. The most substantial legacy
39 of the pandemic will perhaps be the need to focus on and prioritize physical and emotional well-
40 being and honour human relationships ⁹, which might also have enhanced this "compassionate
41 leadership" culture.
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45 Leaders are also humans; they work with other human beings and can get—and should
46 allow themselves to get—emotional ¹⁰. Expressing emotion is, perhaps, one of the most intuitive
47 aspects of our lives that connects us beyond class, gender, religion, language, or other artificial
48 contexts and influences how we perceive and experience the world. Whether we like it or not,
49 emotion guides many human interactions and inevitably, consciously or subconsciously, governs
50 our decisions. However much we want to hide it, we also carry our emotions at our workplace.
51 So, a good leader needs to manage and (why not?) harness this wealth of emotions to deliver
52 outcomes. Of course, too much emotion might be sub-optimal, as is too little; all should be in
53 good measure. There is also a gendered aspect to it, with women's emotions being more easily
54 dismissed than men's. While under the same emotional status and expression, one person might
55 be characterized as "a tough, passionate, or transparent leader," another might be labelled as a
56 "rigid, emotional, or weak leader," all because of gender bias ¹⁰.
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Compassionate leadership focuses on relationships; this might encompass active listening, building trust, understanding, empathizing with and supporting other people, communicating effectively, empowering others to reach their full potential, and feeling respected and cared for^{11,12}. In healthcare, a "by nature" very emotive working environment, whether this relates to healthcare professional-patient relationships or the partnerships between different healthcare professionals, experiencing and employing compassionate leadership is essential to navigating the challenges that arise. There is strong evidence that compassionate leadership in healthcare results in more engaged and motivated staff with high levels of well-being, resulting in high-quality care for patients^{11,12}. When an employee is thriving, the organization is thriving; it is that simple.

So what does leading from the heart look like?

The following paragraphs will briefly discuss some of the basic characteristics of compassionate leadership.

a. Self-knowledge

How can one manage and lead others when they do not know themselves? Self-knowledge and understanding of one's weaknesses and strengths are essential to managing others. Knowing yourself means you also know your feelings and emotions and can self-regulate while leading. Allowing yourself to experience a range of emotions can also make you more emotionally intelligent and empathetic, another trait of a good, compassionate leader. How can you love and care for others when you do not know how to love and care for yourself?

b. Empathy and emotional intelligence

According to research, empathy is the most important leadership skill¹³. The leader understands the challenges of others and can put themselves in other people's shoes; they can understand other people's perspectives, even though they might have never experienced these themselves because they demonstrate emotional intelligence. A compassionate leader is kind and respectful, who talks and acts with sincere concern for others and considers their well-being a priority. A compassionate leader will perform selfless acts for others while expecting nothing in return. They will also seek to discuss feelings, show warmth, and be great listeners. Active listening¹⁴ is perhaps a key feature of empathy and emotional intelligence. It affords others the time, space and psychological safety to off-load worries, anxieties, and challenges, which might impact their growth or that of the organization in the future. While empathy and compassion are used interchangeably, there are subtle differences.¹⁵ Empathy has been defined as an ability to understand and accurately acknowledge the feelings of another, leading to an attuned response from the observer.¹⁶ In contrast, compassion means etymologically to "suffer with" and has been defined as "a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it¹⁷." However you name it, emotional intelligence is all about putting people first.

c. Effective communication

Active listening and empathy demonstrated by leaders are key to effective communication. Communication relates to the content of the communication (news, results, thoughts,

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4 evaluations, emotions, plans), as well as the delivery of it (the tone, the format, the
5 presentation, the duration). Bad news can be delivered subtly to enable a culture of resilience
6 and support. Good news can be communicated with praise to further personal development
7 and organizational growth. However, the opposite can be true, too: bad news can be
8 exaggerated to cultivate a culture of fear, and good news can be muted to ensure the leader
9 remains in control. A compassionate leader who leads from the heart must be transparent
10 and accurate in their communication, inform and entertain their audience, and create shared
11 ownership of the vision, sharing decision-making responsibilities and delegating effectively.
12 Effective communication can inspire and lead to strong engagement, optimal outcome, and
13 satisfaction of employees¹⁸. Compassionate leaders also need to build a culture of trust to
14 enable reciprocal communication by their employees and allow the most valued exchange of
15 ideas.

21 **d. A culture of trust**

22 Trust is the glue that holds our civilization together; whatever we do, a commercial
23 agreement, a legal contract, a purchase, a romantic relationship, teaching a course or playing
24 with friends, we rely on trust for a meaningful human exchange of goods, of emotions, of
25 ideas¹⁹. A culture of trust is difficult to achieve and easy to lose; it requires a lot of investment
26 and personal capital, time, mutual effort and commitment. It relies on consistency between
27 words and actions (under-promise and over-deliver are always better than the opposite),
28 transparency (hence clear communication is essential to establish trust), authenticity
29 (enabling people to be their authentic selves) and integrity²⁰. Integrity is a ubiquitous ideal in
30 leadership: everyone seems to want integrity in their leaders, but as Carter's quote below
31 alludes to, there appears to be significant confusion about what it is or how to foster it:
32 "Integrity is a lot like the weather: everyone talks about it, but no one knows what to do about
33 it." ²¹ For many, integrity in a leader means that the person's words (and actions) are
34 governed by moral values such as honesty, credibility, and fairness. In return, a
35 compassionate leader must demonstrate these attributes to be trusted by his employees and
36 command their loyalty.

43 **e. Leading by example**

44 As consistency between promises and actions is vital, a good, compassionate leader is
45 expected to lead by example. They are expected to be hard-working, be able to share feelings,
46 be able to harness these feelings to support growth, and demonstrate all the moral principles
47 discussed above in practice. A compassionate leader should be a real role model for their
48 employees and accept and acknowledge that nobody is perfect and that we are all on a
49 learning journey of self-discovery.

54 **f. Accountability**

55 In this journey, mistakes will often happen, and those who lead from the heart should be able
56 to show accountability in practice. A compassionate leader is not afraid to say "thank you"
57 and "sorry"; they recognize their mistakes and apologize for them, ensuring they have a plan
58 of action to improve and learn from them. There is no shame in taking responsibility for your
59 actions, whether they prove right or wrong. The same leaders that are often strict on
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4 themselves when they err are the best when it comes to supporting others with their own
5 mistakes. This is because they know how it feels to be in that position and ensure they enable
6 their staff to find their path again and build resilience through adversity. These leaders are
7 usually the first to admit their mistakes to ensure they build further trust within the team and
8 a no-blame culture. This culture reinforces innovation, creativity, productivity and growth²².
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11 **g. Inclusion**

12 Team diversity must be celebrated as a source of innovation, representation, and success.
13 The compassionate leader must ensure a culture of inclusion and equity for employees of
14 different genders, religions, social classes, sexual orientations, ages, ethnicity, colour, beliefs,
15 and disability, where all opinions are valued and considered. A neurodiverse workforce allows
16 for shared ideas and perspectives and innovative solutions to be tested, resulting in services
17 and products that serve and represent everyone in society. Respecting the other person as
18 a unique individual, being inclusive, celebrating differences and acknowledging individual
19 preferences enhances teamwork and collaboration, ensuring everyone's strengths are used
20 for a common cause, and nobody feels left out.
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26 **h. Investing in the people**

27 Prioritizing personal development for all employees and supporting them in gaining the
28 knowledge, skills and competencies to achieve career development and promotion is critical
29 when leading. Employees are motivated when they can see a clear career pathway, a caring
30 leader and a manager that considers their needs. A leader that develops and empowers
31 others to succeed is a considerate leader who understands their employees' ambitions before
32 they even need to discuss them. Similarly, a caring leader praises the success of their
33 employees and rewards them; at the same time, they support those who struggle so that
34 they can succeed in the future. Investing in people requires time, money, and effort, but it
35 builds trust, loyalty and commitment within the team.
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41 **i. A source of inspiration**

42 People stand behind the big ideas and are willing to follow leaders with a vision, no matter
43 how hard the mission will be. Those who lead from the heart share the "bigger picture" with
44 their employees as an act of trust and goodwill: "this is where we are heading, are you happy
45 to come on board? It will be difficult, but we can do it together, and I count on each one of
46 you to achieve this". Inspiring leaders are calm under pressure, ensure the plan's
47 sustainability and always—proactively—integrate succession planning to ensure the team's
48 vision can be realized even when they are not around anymore because the vision is larger
49 than the leader and the team²³. Compassionate leaders cultivate confidence and camaraderie
50 in the team; they are expert networkers and skilled communicators. These are the teams that
51 transform practice; these are the teams that bring on much-needed change.
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56 **j. Nurture connections, build a community**

57 Within a team, there are people from different backgrounds, different stories to tell, different
58 perspectives, and different abilities and motivations. A person who leads from the heart is a
59 leader who can unite everyone under a common cause, instil cohesion within the team, build
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connections and create a community where everyone helps each other and feels a sense of belonging. A compassionate leader creates a compassionate team; it is that simple. The leader gives the tempo and creates the culture; the team mirrors its leader. Within such a team, success and accountability are shared; there is respect, kindness, and good communication. Emotions are discussed, celebrated, and harnessed to regulate relationships, address challenges, and meet targets. A compassionate team is a good team to be in.

Conclusion

Despite common perceptions, emotion is a valuable element of transformative leadership, as a window to the human psyche. As leadership is about managing people, it is essential to acknowledge their feelings, to understand their needs and motivations. Compassionate leaders balance reason and emotion to achieve their team's vision. Reflecting on our emotions should not be a sign of weakness but rather a sign of strength and a much-needed journey to personal and collective well-being. So next time, don't think twice to crack that smile when you are happy, shed that tear when you are sad, hold this hand when you are afraid, or punch your fist on the table when you see injustice taking place around you; you are not being emotional, you are human. Our world and healthcare systems will greatly benefit from a "leading from the heart" approach. To achieve optimal outcomes, they will rely on this to rebuild trust, recover from the pandemic, and repair the highly valued human relationships between healthcare workers and patients.

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