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Sustaining Emotional Intelligence Over the Long Haul

How to Infuse Your Workplace With Hope, Compassion and Caring

Review by Chris Lauer

RESONANT LEADERSHIP

by Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee

Harvard Business School Press, © 2005, 286 pages,
\$25.95, ISBN 1-59139-563-1

More than a decade ago, Daniel Goleman published his seminal business book *Emotional Intelligence*, which finally put into words one of the most important concepts that many successful leaders had been thinking about for years but had difficulty finding the proper vocabulary to discuss. With his best-selling book, Goleman helped to give business leaders a new set of workplace competencies that improve how they manage their feelings, interact with each other and communicate.

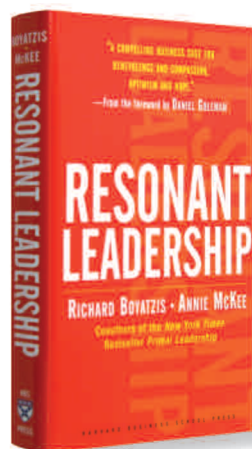
Goleman's work described how ultimately, people's emotions play a pivotal role in leadership, and how those who master their emotions and use them in their work with others can create the positive relationships that lead to organizational and personal success. The "domains" of emotional intelligence Goleman describes in *Emotional Intelligence* are awareness of one's self, the management of one's self, being socially aware and the ability to manage relationships.

Several years later, Goleman followed up his best-seller with *Primal Leadership*, which he co-authored with fellow leadership experts Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, two professors who share Goleman's belief in the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership in the workplace and beyond.

In *Resonant Leadership*, Boyatzis and McKee follow up

their previous work with more guidance on how to improve leadership by breaking through stress with the skills that create hope, compassion, mindfulness and connecting with others. They call the people who master these skills "resonant" leaders.

While the emotionally intelligent, resonant leader offers organizations many positive benefits, outlined with new research and compelling stories throughout *Resonant Leadership*, the emotionally ignorant, "dissonant" leader is the antithesis of the leader who works hard to capture the benefits of emotional connections. Instead of creating harmony within their organizations, the authors write, dissonant leaders become ineffective because the job stress they internalize quickly spreads throughout their organizations. This dissonance takes the form of distress, exhaustion, anger, fear, frustration and antagonism. These volatile, negative emotions lead to reactivity that can deeply damage relationships and organizations.



Mastering the Cycle of Sacrifice and Renewal

By dismantling the "power stress" that comes with leadership into its basic components, such as complex decision making and the loneliness it breeds, the authors describe how power-related stress can lead to chronic stress, which can hurt leaders and the people around them. While power stress usually comes with the territory of leadership, the authors point out that its chronic nature can force leaders into unhealthy habits that display themselves in such detrimental ways as constant distress and burnout. They write that the key to managing stress, dissonance and what they call "the Cycle of Sacrifice and Renewal," is

returning to the healthy benefits of resonance.

Positive messages pour out from every chapter in *Resonant Leadership*. Boyatzis and McKee are such seasoned veterans of the leadership realm that each page of their book exudes confident management wisdom. Their stories and research demonstrate the joys of resonance in the workplace and the home. Building strengths in the supposedly “soft” regions of leadership is often the most difficult part of a leader’s journey to excellence, so their advice is a welcome addition to the leadership lexicon.

Mastering one’s emotions can be a daunting task, but these leadership experts offer a welcome guide to tapping into the power of some of the most basic and overlooked tools for work and life satisfaction. They skillfully use science and experience to describe relationship-building tools that hit the reader deeply, thanks to many fascinating stories and research results. The enduring power of self-renewal and relationship growth through hope, compassion and caring is a subject the authors deliver with beautifully balanced grace.

For starters, they appropriately define the challenges leaders face in this tumultuous world of rapidly shifting business changes. Then they describe how crises and chronic stress often create exhaustion, fear and anger, and how these emotions in a leader can harm an organization and its people, or at least become detrimental to its goals.

Two Very Different Leaders

To exemplify the challenges people face in their daily work, the authors look closely at two very different leaders: the fictionalized “Eduardo” and Southwest Airlines’ Colleen Barrett. Eduardo represents the leader whose successes helped him rise up the corporate ladder, but when he loses sight of the real goals of his organization and falls into dissonant patterns that drive people away, his bad behavior eventually leads to organizational failure. Through his story, readers get a realistic view of the damaging effects of stress and negative emotions in the workplace. On the other hand, the story of Barrett’s experiences as a leader at Southwest Airlines shows readers what the resonant leader does to create a positive workplace culture that succeeds through even the toughest times. Her story shows how a resonant leader puts time and effort toward creating and sustaining healthy working relationships. By contrasting the work styles and approaches of these two leaders, the authors offer readers a compelling view of how dissonant leaders

prevent success and resonant leaders breed it.

Along with true stories from the front lines of leadership, the authors present the latest research that backs up their case studies with hard data. For example, after presenting the stories of Eduardo and Barrett to demonstrate the importance of the work cultures leaders create, the authors support the ideas in their book with the results of a study showing that “the culture of an organization, and in particular the way people feel about the climate, can account for nearly 30 percent of business performance.” Hard facts show that the “soft” skills of the resonant leader are vital to his or her organization’s success.

Although hope, compassion and caring are not the usual terminology used by the tough-minded leaders from the command-and-control era of organizational management, the authors of *Resonant Leadership* break these lofty yet vital concepts down into terms anyone can understand.

Inspiration and Challenges

Everyone can recognize that stress, dissonance and burnout at work can be hazardous to people and their organizations. Working to move groups of people in a common direction tends to create chronic stress in leaders, the authors write, but it doesn’t have to lead to negative results like it did when Eduardo lost his way and failed to use emotional intelligence in his work. The authors recognize the chronic nature of a leader’s stress, but they also offer a solution to the problems it creates. The trick is to add renewal to the mix.

Renewal for the resonant leader entails taking time to address one’s emotional and personal needs, which requires a deeper awareness of what those needs are. The authors write that knowing one’s self is the only way to know how to create the renewal that allows a leader to stay effective in his or her role. Finding the parts of the job that offer a leader hope, inspiration and challenges is a first step on the road to renewal. Creating time in the day to be alone and reflect is another way to sustain the resonance that helps a leader succeed. By offering leaders tips on creating and sustaining resonance in their lives, the authors present a variety of tools they can use to avoid dissonance and counteract the stress that comes with a leader’s job.

The Sacrifice Syndrome

The underlying mission of *Resonant Leadership* is to keep leaders from becoming the ineffective, irritating,

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abrasive and oblivious people who can run a company or a relationship into the ground. It can happen to even the best leaders. Even the most experienced leader can become overwhelmed by the daily pressures of a difficult job when he or she loses resonance. The authors call this problem “the Sacrifice Syndrome,” and explain that it occurs when a leader gets overwhelmed by the stress of his or her job.

When the day-after-day pressures and sacrifices of a power position become too much, a leader can fall victim to the stresses, crises and exhaustion leadership can create. Once the Sacrifice Syndrome kicks in, defensive routines can keep the leader from recognizing what is really going on inside him or her as well as within the organization. As a result, the entire organization begins to exhibit dissonant behaviors that can even become institutionalized. This negative spiral can lead to the negativity and dissonance that can destroy a leader and even an organization.

A Pernicious Affliction

The trouble with this downward spiral is that, although everyone notices it, nobody is willing to step up and tell the truth to a leader who is in denial about the results of his or her behaviors. This “CEO Disease,” the authors write, leads to overly cautious underlings tiptoeing around a leader whose habits are wreaking havoc on the workplace. The authors write that most leaders are susceptible to catching the CEO Disease. When they do, communication breaks down, the leader becomes distant and the malady gets worse. When leaders deny their vulnerability to this pernicious affliction, the stress of leadership can slip out in negative behaviors. When resonance is lost, relationships crumble and even the best leaders become less effective. Over time, anxiety and tension rear their ugly heads and destructive dissonance dominates where resonance once reigned. As a result, leaders stress out their managers, managers spread their tension to front-line workers and the entire organization suffers.

Dissonance can take many shapes. By telling the pertinent stories of people who have suffered from dissonance, the authors reveal its manifestations as well as the sources of renewal to counteract its power to drive people and organizations into the ground.

The rising expectations that come with leadership roles can become sources of “power stress,” the authors write. When ignored, this stress can lead to the dysfunctional coping mechanisms that ruin families and friendships. Resulting problems can sap confidence and cause people to shut down. Denial pushes leaders deeper into disengagement, which, according to the authors, is another sure sign of dissonance.

Renewal

Boyatzis and McKee write that renewal is the key to fighting power stress. They explain that some kind of renewal process is vital to keeping a leader energized. To back up their remedy for dissonance, they present the results of many recent scientific studies from a variety of fields. For example, they explain that new research shows how renewal has positive effects on our mood because it releases helpful hormones in the brain and takes our brain pattern to a healthier place. Once our perceptions begin to shift, our behavior begins to change. The authors explain that the effects of renewing the mind, body and heart are critical for improved relationships and effective leadership.

Through a variety of experiences and studies, the authors offer leaders a straight path to greater resonance. The story of Reuters chairman Niall FitzGerald describes the tale of a resonant leader at the top of his game who slipped into the Sacrifice Syndrome and found himself sliding down toward dissonance. The wake-up calls that alerted him to his problems consisted of problems at work, lost friendships, a broken marriage and the last words of a dying friend. Suddenly, he realized he was not living the life he wanted. This self-awareness opened the door for FitzGerald to seek resonance by engaging in real change in his life and work.

The authors explain that wake-up calls are only the first step toward creating change. They write that engaging in real change requires capturing dreams and plotting a path toward them. Research shows that articulating a compelling dream for the future is the next step. Then, the authors write, a leader needs to look at what he or she needs to change in order to improve. Finally, they add, renewal needs to become a way of life.

Mindfulness, Hope and Compassion

The authors’ prescription for renewal and resonance has three active ingredients: mindfulness, hope and compassion. This powerful triad offers a clear path to good feelings and healthier relationships that lead to the resilience needed to face

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difficult challenges. Cultivating these habits helps renewal become a continuous source of power to fuel a leader's journey to effectiveness and resonance. Although finding his path to resonant leadership cost Niall FitzGerald his first marriage, the authors' advice helps others prevent his mistakes.

The authors point out that being honest and true to one's self helps a person get in touch with the values that often get left behind in the pursuit of ambitious career objectives. Old habits die hard, but the authors include a variety of exercises and research results that offer leaders the support that encourages resonance. Simple reflection points and personal exercises, such as a worksheet for determining the rhythm of changes in an active career, offer readers opportunities to interject themselves into the authors' scenarios for growth so that deeper learning about emotional intelligence and resonant leadership can take place.

The Ideal Self

Once a leader is ready to change, the authors write, he or she needs to develop an image of his or her *ideal self*. This image of what a person wants out of life, and who the person wants to be, then leads to a personal vision of the differences between the ideal self and the real self, including strengths and weaknesses. By showing leaders how to capitalize on their strengths in order to move closer to the ideal self, the authors help them experiment with new habits, reinforce positive attributes and develop and maintain the positive personal relationships that help people move toward the renewal leading to resonance.

When the authors discuss mindfulness, the first element in their cure for dissonance, they are writing about the "capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences *inside the self* — body, mind, heart, spirit — and to pay full attention to what is happening *around us* — people, the natural world, our surroundings, and events." Tuning in to ourselves, our environment and other people keeps us mindful, they add. When a leader remembers to be mindful, he or she can better avoid unin-

formed decisions that lead to negative results.

Hope is the second part of the antidote that helps leaders fight the disease of dissonance. According to the authors, studies show that hope leads to other good feelings, more positive thinking, better coping skills and less depression. Better coping skills and positive emotions lead to improved reasoning, interactions with others and personal effectiveness. The authors write that these attributes lead to more openness, "cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, empathy, willingness to seek variety and persistence." All of these terrific results stem from the clarity, goal setting and sense of well-being that are part of what hope is all about.

Empathy and Caring

The authors explain that the third active ingredient in the remedy for dissonance is compassion. Through real-life stories of empathy and caring put into action with creativity and resilience, the authors complete their potent formula for resonance. By adding the virtue of benevolence to their work and lives, leaders gain a valuable way to connect with others, help them meet their needs and also enjoy the benefits of the renewal that results from their individual efforts. One tip the authors offer as a starting point for compassion is as simple as it is effective: listen. By pointing out the sometimes obvious benefits of becoming an in-tune, listening and caring person, the authors remind us about the basic human values that often get overlooked when people get more power in their jobs.

Throughout *Resonant Leadership*, powerful neuroscience, physiology, psychology and true business tales support the authors' process for creating organizational and personal success. Compelling data and fascinating results give *Resonant Leadership* a solid backbone of facts and humanity to support the many counterintuitive techniques proposed by the authors. By helping to inject the difficult yet vital subjects of hope, compassion, caring and renewal into the daily lives of leaders, Boyatzis and McKee offer welcome relief to those struggling with dissonance in their lives. ●

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