

Leaders with Social-Emotional Learning Skills Are a Force for Global Good



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Matt Segneri, Director of the Social Enterprise Initiative (SEI) at Harvard Business School, has a broad range of leadership experience in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, most recently at Bloomberg Philanthropies in New York, where he was a senior leader on the Government Innovation team. From 2010 to 2012, Segneri was an advisor to the then-mayor of the City of Boston, Thomas M. Menino. An honors graduate of Harvard College (2004), where he majored in psychology, with additional studies in economics and government, Segneri spent four years (2004–2008) as a consultant at the Monitor Group in its New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts, offices before entering Harvard Business School, where he received an MBA.

I worked in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors before returning to Harvard Business School and assuming my current responsibilities. And over those years, I was struck by the extent to which CEOs and leaders of large organizations truly needed social-emotional learning (SEL) skills in order to fulfill their potential and achieve results for those they served.

SEL is especially valuable for leaders who are in challenging people or workforce situations. If you're leading a private-sector company today, for example, you have to build relationships with demanding customers as well as employees who are trying to come to terms with the broad and sweeping transformation to an information economy. If you're a mayor running a city, you have to establish connective bonds with a diverse cross-section of citizens.

This type of 21st-century leadership requires self-awareness, authenticity,

empathy, and the ability to self-manage emotions—especially in conflict situations, during crises, and when under pressure.

Leadership today requires empathy to attract, nurture, and retain the best talent, and to meet stakeholders and customers where they are. Empathy is a skill that yields better choices and decisions—based on the needs of others and the needs of the community.

People all over the world are yearning for this kind of leadership right now, where the person responsible for an organization is sincerely engaged and operating as his or her best self.

On a more pragmatic and micro level, leaders without social-emotional skills simply can't motivate or inspire people to collaborate and partner in order to get things done. When you analyze how the world works today, it's all about trust and open, honest communication, such as inclusive discussions and conversations between people who may be in the same office cubicle or across the ocean and continents away. Having SEL competency is a prerequisite for making these dialogues productive and successful.

Helping to educate and develop leaders with these social-emotional skills is infused throughout our

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curriculum and community at Harvard Business School (HBS).

One of our faculty members—Bill George (HBS '66), professor of management practice and the former CEO of Medtronic—has really built out our work on authentic leadership. He's written two important books on the topic—*Authentic Leadership* and *True North*. He's also published a seminal article (along with Peter Sims, a management writer and entrepreneur, and Andrew N. McLean, a research associate at Harvard Business School) that explains how the best leaders channel their own personal transformative experiences to access the strength and wisdom they need to help the employees, constituents, or communities they serve.

As Ann Fudge (HBS '77), a member of several corporate boards and a former CEO of Young & Rubicam Brands, told George and his associates: "All of us have the spark of leadership in us, whether it is in business, in government, or as a nonprofit volunteer. The challenge is to understand ourselves well enough to discover where we can use our leadership gifts to serve others."

HBS also offers a course on Authentic Leadership Development (ALD) (www.hbs.edu/coursecatalog/2090.html). The course was originally developed by Bill George; it was once taught by the present dean of HBS, Nitin Nohria; and it's currently taught by Professors Scott Snook and Tom DeLong.

The purpose of ALD is to enable students to embark on paths of personal leadership development. ALD demands introspection, curiosity, and reflection from students, as well as vulnerability and openness to share in class discussions, leadership discussion groups, and one-on-one sessions with peer mentors and the professor.

Finally, the HBS executive education program offers a weeklong immersion in authentic leadership (www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/ald/Pages/curriculum.aspx). Bill George currently teaches in this program.

Empathic and emotionally mindful leadership in business, government, and the nonprofit sector is a tremendous force for good all over the world today. And more than ever, our leaders must serve as vital and connected role models for people everywhere if we're really committed to prosperity, harmony, and an enriched quality of life in the 21st century.