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HOW LEADERS MANAGE EMOTIONS AT WORK

Welcome to *The Highly Valued Leader* podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team.

Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Welcome back to *The Highly Valued Leader* podcast. I'm Mel Savage. Today, I want to talk about something that we don't talk about enough at work. And that's about being emotional. We don't talk about how to be emotional at work. In fact, we talk about how to not be emotional at work most of the time, and we talk about emotional intelligence. But not a lot of people or bosses or whatever can actually tell you what that means. What does it mean to be emotionally intelligent? Obviously, some can tell you that for sure. But we don't talk about it a lot.

I personally, in my career, never thought to ask at the beginning of my leadership journey. I was actually kind of in shame, to be honest, because I believed that I wasn't very emotionally intelligent. I didn't want to ask about it because I didn't want to look stupid. And we do that a lot for a lot of different things. Mine was about emotional intelligence. It took me a lot of years before I actually read some books about it and got interested in it and wanted to start actually figuring it out.

Whereas, at the time, if coaching was as available to then as it is now, I might have actually got someone to help me figure this out. But I was in so much shame, and I didn't know what to do. And I thought I'm not very good at this, and I'm gonna get found out. Shame for anything, whatever you're feeling, or whatever it is about your career, when you're feeling shame, that holds you back from doing things and from figuring things out when you're ashamed. You just avoid the topic altogether. And that's what I did for a long time.

People will talk about EQ, but no one ever said it. I don't think I had a lot of EQ-focused bosses, to be honest. But really, it was on me to figure it out. And it was this intangible thing that we didn't really talk about, nor do we measure ourselves against. But it is so important. Emotional intelligence and how you manage your emotions at work is critical to your success as a leader.

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One of the people who I think is the foremost expert on emotional intelligence is a gentleman named Daniel Goleman. And he is a great resource. He's got lots of books on it. Lots of articles have been written about him. When you google him, you will find five different signs of emotional intelligence that he talks about. So I'm going to go through them with you high level right here. And then I'm going to define them in my words in terms of how I teach against them, and how I help my clients bring them to life.

Sign number one of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. Self-awareness is really the ability to recognize and understand your own thoughts your own feelings and your own emotions. And you'll know that when you can actually name it. You have an emotional vocabulary. A lot of people don't have emotional vocabularies, by the way. They can't really name their emotions. They'll say good, bad, happy, sad, but they don't go a lot deeper than that. And so it's an opportunity for you to not only recognize that you're having an emotion but be able to name the emotion.

I think a really key part of this which I don't necessarily see in Daniel's work or Mr. Goleman's work, but I think is so important is how those emotions feel in your body. Like where's the tension for those emotions? For me anxiety, the tension is in my stomach. For me, stress is usually on my shoulders. For me, fear is usually in my throat. Where is the tension in your body? Just having a lot of self-awareness of emotions.

Number two is self-regulation. How you manage your emotions. We often resist our emotions in the corporate world. We push them down, we don't want to have them. It's not professional to be emotional. But once you notice your emotions, and you have the self-awareness, how do you feel those emotions without resisting them? When you feel anger, how do you feel that emotion without trying to push it down?

I'm not saying you act out on the anger. But when you resist the anger, it doesn't go away. That's the short form, it doesn't go away. That's the high level. So you need to feel it, but without acting on it. How do you ground yourself in this emotion without acting out on it? And then decide what kind of emotion you actually want to have. There's like a process there.

I'm going to talk today about self-regulation. It's self-awareness, which is naming, recognizing, and then knowing how it feels in your body. Self-regulation is not resisting it, feeling it, but not acting out on it. And then ultimately choosing an emotion that you want to use to move forward so that you can get the results that you want. What I just said there, that little sentence is a game changer. It is so huge. That's just the first two elements of emotional intelligence. But if you can do that, your life will change and work will get so much easier. Those are the first two.

Number three is motivation. How do you motivate yourself? Generally speaking, we want things to motivate us. I want a job that motivates me, I want work that motivates me, whatever. But things don't motivate you. Projects don't motivate you. We motivate ourselves. The key here is how you motivate yourself, even when you don't naturally feel motivated to do something.

I will tell you, I was not naturally motivated to record this podcast for you. I want to. I want to do it. I want to make sure it's good for you but there's a bit of anxiety for me doing it. I'm a little nervous to do it. That kind of gets in the way of the motivation. So I have to be able to motivate myself to do it, even when I don't feel motivated. How you create the motivation on demand is a key part of emotional intelligence and an amazing skill set for getting things done effectively and getting results is the environment to get results for your team.

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Number four, empathy. Empathy, I'm sure you know is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. It's the ability to not only understand how someone might be feeling and relate to it. But to take it further, it's an ability to feel how other people are. It's almost like saying you're an empath. Like, I know this person is feeling this way I've been there and I can feel that. It's about how you put your ego to one side and really try to understand where the other person is coming from, with the intention of supporting them or resolving the issue in some way.

I think empathy is the number one emotion all leaders need to tap into more. We as humans, especially in today's society, could use a lot more empathy, believe me. But it's really useful when you manage people. It's really useful when you're trying to influence change in organizations. It's really useful when you're managing conflict or sort of weedy-charged situations. Empathy and being able to put yourself in the other person's shoes, feel their emotions, be able to put your ego aside to really understand where they're coming from, and then help them resolve the situation is my sort of *chef's kiss*. It's beautiful. It's a beautiful thing.

And number five, social skills. This is all from Daniel Goleman. How to connect and communicate effectively with people and how you influence and motivate them. You know that social skills are very obvious and you can do it, by the way. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, you have to do it your own way. But it is very possible.

Those are the five skills or the five signs of emotional intelligence that Daniel Goleman goes through. I've given you my interpretations of those five skills. How you manage your emotions is going to be the thing that differentiates you as a leader from the rest of the pack because not a lot of people ground themselves in emotional intelligence. Knowing how to manage your emotions and knowing how to be emotional at work is what is going to make you a highly valuable leader.

We're not going to go through in detail all five of those different signs of emotional intelligence today. That would be a podcast for the future. But I'm going to tap more into the first two, which are about self-awareness, and self-regulation. That's really what I want to cover today. The goal of this podcast episode is to help you ideally regulate and proactively choose your emotional responses so that you can be your best leader. Regulate, meaning, feel and calm your nervous system. Regulate your emotions so that you can proactively now choose your emotional responses, which is going to make you the best leader. It's also going to help you get the results that you're looking for. That's my intention for today's podcast.

We'll also cover how you're probably currently dealing with your emotions, why that's probably not a long-term strategy for you, and how to feel through your emotions effectively. I love it now on Instagram where I'm seeing all these live videos of kids feeling through and being taught to feel their emotions and being given language to articulate how they're feeling. It's normalizing feeling your emotions at a very young age. I wish we had this.

Because now, when I talk to leaders today, and even myself when I first learned that I needed to feel my emotions, I was like, what kind of *whoo* stuff is this? I'm not doing this. It sounds so weird. I've been taught to repress my emotions from a very young age. I come by it, honestly. And I'm sure many of you do, too. But the key here is to be able to regulate your emotions and choose your emotions, the easiest way, the less stressful way, the thing that was gonna take the least amount of energy is to actually learn to feel your emotions effectively. And then choose your emotions so that you can be your best leader. I want to give you some tricks to be able to do that today.

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Let's talk about why maybe you're not doing this. I just gave you a really great reason. If you're my age, sort of in that age, I'm 50+. But if you're like, 35+, you probably have learned to repress your emotions and that being emotional is weak, in some way. And you're probably not even thinking about it. You're not even thinking about it as a thing that you need to do to manage your emotions. Or if you are thinking about managing your emotions, you're making it mean that you need to control them. You need to push them down; you need to resist them; you need to pretend you don't have them; you need to hide them so that no one can see how things are affecting you.

If you've been told that you wear your heart on your sleeve, you make too many faces in meetings, and that you need to hide what you're thinking, you're being told to hide your emotions. And if for some reason, you are emotional at work, the general feeling of leadership is often to tell you that you need to stop being emotional right now. I think there's a difference between being emotional and perhaps using an emotion that's not serving you. Like outbursts and frustration and anger and acting out from those emotions. I think a better way for leadership to deal with this, if you're a leader listening to this is to tell people that they need to learn to regulate their emotions and choose the emotions they want to act from, not to tell people to stop being emotional. Because we're human beings, we're emotional.

Now, the corporate environment is changing. Mental health is at the forefront. I love that so much. I wish it was more in the forefront when I was coming up through corporate. And it's great. But think about this, a corporate environment is so charged with emotions. Because you're putting lots of people together right away. There's politics and emotions and competitiveness and all this kind of stuff that just comes from us being human and having a human brain.

On top of that in a corporate environment, our identities are wrapped up in our jobs, meaning, how good we are at our jobs or the money we make or whatever. Who we are, our security is wrapped up in our jobs. And there are fewer and fewer positions as you move up the corporate ladder, or around the corporate ladder. So that feels like there's some sort of scarcity there. Like I need to fight to protect what I have, or it's sort of set up like rats in a cage. I hate to put it that way because it doesn't have to be that way. But it's sort of set up structurally like that.

And so we have to find our way through and it's an extremely emotional environment. There are so many opportunities throughout the day, day-in and day-out, to take things personally, to judge yourself, to judge others, to fear for your security, and to beat yourself up. It's a very supercharged environment just based on its structure of it. And then later on, this needs to appear completely unemotional about it. It's like a recipe for a nervous breakdown. Of course, you need to be emotional about it.

This structure layered on with this need to appear unemotional is going to increase the chances of burnout. So I really want to be able to help you learn to be functionally emotional, and be effectively emotional. I think it's a better way to say it. Because what a lot of us are taught at work and at home is to repress emotions, particularly at work and particularly with women. How many times have the ladies, if you identify as a woman, been told not to be emotional, or that we're too emotional? It's a very patriarchal statement.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not blaming men when I say patriarchal, at all. When I say something as patriarchal, I'm just saying it's social. We've all been socialized in a society that's based on the demeanor of men. That's just the way it is. That's that's the history of how our world has evolved so far. But that's not to say that men are wrong for that. It's just the way it's been. But telling people not to be emotional is a very patriarchal way of being. Telling

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people it's better to repress your emotions is very patriarchal. Don't get me wrong, it's hard for men, too to operate in this patriarchal society, because they're told that being emotional is weak.

But what I want to offer you is that actually being emotional is very strong. It's very strong to be able to manage your emotions. Knowing how to be emotional is very strong. Dealing with your emotions is extremely strong. It's so powerful. And I'm not saying that you should just be emotional all over everybody and let it fly. Like, let your anger and frustration and worry and whatever, fear fly and take it out on people. No, I'm actually saying the opposite. When you just let your emotions fly like that, it's actually to me, very lazy. I don't think it's weak. I think it's just lazy because you're not managing yourself but you're expecting everyone else to manage themselves so that they can manage you.

The sign of a great leader is someone who can manage themselves so that other people don't have to work as hard to manage them. I'm talking about controlling your energy, controlling your emotions, and learning to take action from an emotion that's going to get you the result that you want. So I want to give you some examples of what I mean. Like, it's not about what you say. People always say to me, *'What should I say?'* in a coaching session. They have a situation and they don't know what to say, or they don't know what to do.

Before we talk about what you should say and what you should do, let's talk about who you want to be in this situation. I want to give you an example of why your energy and your emotions are critical. And the words actually don't matter. Let's just take a simple thing like saying *'hello.'* If you said *'hello'* to someone coming from the emotion of disinterest, how would that sound? If you sounded happy, how would it sound? If you sounded calm, how would it sound? If you sounded frustrated, how would it sound for you to say *'hello'?* We can say *'hello'* in all different kinds of energies, and it's going to land very differently.

Same thing if you said to someone, *'How are you doing with that work?'* If you're frustrated with this person, or if you if you're judging them, or if you're being supportive. You can say it from my place of curiosity, you can say it from an energy of anger, you can say it from a lot of different places. It's not about the words that you use, it's the energy with which you say the words. If you're saying something from a calm or a supportive or a nurturing energy, it doesn't really matter what you say, because it's going to land as calm and supportive and nurturing. I want you to think about that.

We spend so much time telling people what to do and what to say. And I think we need to be spending more time on helping people decide what kind of energy, what kind of emotion they want to bring to what they're saying and doing. The trick is to choose the emotion that you want to say things from and choose that energy, I say energy and emotion are interchangeable, choosing that energy will create the best result, without repressing what else you might be feeling. That's really the key.

You want to come from a place of calm, supportive, or whatever the right energy is. I'm just staying calm and supportive. But you don't want to pretend to be calm and supportive while repressing anger, frustration, and judgment. That's what we're going to talk about later today. So if you're asking yourself, *'What happens if my reaction is anger? How do I get from anger to this calm place? I don't want to show up like an angry person. But I don't know what to do about that.'* And I think that's the biggest question. That's the trick.

And right now, what you're doing is repressing the anger, which by the way, never works. Because even when you're trying to pretend to be calm, people can still feel the anger seeping through most of the time. Sometimes

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you nail it but that takes so much energy to repress one emotion and pretend to be another emotion. That's exhausting. So we want to be able to make this easier. And the solution is counterintuitive. The solution to being able to move from anger to a more effective emotion, or any sort of ineffective emotion to an effective emotion, is to feel the ineffective emotion. So the trick in this case would be to feel the anger.

Basically, it's like what I said about at the beginning–awareness and regulation. *I feel angry right now about this*, and being able to recognize it, name it, and then know where it is in your body. Where are you feeling the anger and just noticing where the anger is in your body? Anger for me is in my throat a lot of the time. And that's why, when I would get super angry, I would cry a little bit, because I felt like I was choking. Where the anger was coming from? So you really want to understand where it's coming from for you, where you're feeling it in your body.

When you do that, when you start to observe the emotion like, *I'm feeling angry. It's in my throat.* You start to observe that more like from a third-party position, even though it's happening to you, that creates space in your brain. That just creates some space and objectivity, where you can say, *where is this anger coming from?* That's the first thing you need to understand–*Why am I angry at this moment?* And when you ask yourself that question, what is going to be revealed to you is the thought that you have that's creating the anger.

Our thoughts create our emotions. I want to say that again. Our thoughts create our emotions. Let's say, a circumstance that happened is someone on your team didn't deliver something when they were supposed to. They missed a deadline. Let's just make it something super simple like that. And you feel anger about it. Right now you're blaming the anger on them. *They didn't do the work and so that's why I'm angry*.

But in between what they did and how you feel is a thought. What do you think about them missing a deadline that's creating anger? And usually, it's a thought that's something like, *they shouldn't have missed the deadline, or they're putting me in a tough position, or they're making more work for me*, or something like that. So just understand that you have a thought in there that's creating the anger. And you believe that thought is totally true.

But what I want to offer you is when you take a moment to feel the anger in your body, and then question why you're feeling angry, you're going to find the thought. And then you can ask yourself, *'Is this the thought that I want to operate from?'* And you might say, *'No, I want to operate from a place of curiosity today. I want to find out what happened. Before I get angry about this, I actually just want to find out what happened. And I don't want to come across as fake curious. I want to actually be truly curious about it.'*

If you want to be curious about something, which is an emotion, you need to figure out the thought that you already believe that's going to help you feel curious. So very easy, here's the thought. *I don't know what happened, I want to find out. I want to find out what happened.* That's the thought that you can switch to. Instead of thinking, *'They shouldn't have done this… They're putting me in a terrible position… They're screwing this up for everybody… I'm tired of dealing with them…;'* those thoughts are going to create some ineffective emotions for you.

And instead, at that moment, you can switch to, *'Before I do anything else, I want to understand better. I want to understand better.'* Just saying that to yourself, try it and it will ground you in a more effective emotion, like interest, understanding, supportiveness, or curiosity. Emotions happen quickly, especially negative or ineffective emotions that come from your lower brain, they happen super fast.

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Your job as a leader is to recognize those emotions and slow the process down for yourself so that you can feel the emotion very quickly, question the emotion why you're having it, decide if you want to think the way that you're thinking, and then choose a different thought that's going to create a different emotion for you. This is really a simple step-by-step process. It just takes practice. And it's going to feel so weird at first. You're like, how do you feel an emotion?

By the way, if I haven't said it already, how do you feel an emotion? So you feel the anger in your throat, you just sort of feel it. You relax. When I'm angry, I feel it in my throat and I just relax. You just relax into the tension that's in my throat. If you're feeling stressed and the stress is in your shoulders, you just relax into the tension in your shoulders. Just relax into it. A relaxed body cannot house stress.

If you're feeling anxious and it's in your belly, just relax into it for a couple of seconds. That's going to create space for you to start to question your brain, understand what the thought is, and ask yourself if there's another emotion that you want to feel instead and what thought you need to think to feel that emotion. Don't make up a thought like, *'Oh, it's totally fine. I don't care if they miss a deadline.'* That's bullshit. You don't believe that. You have to find a thought you believe like, *'Before I react, I want to find out what happened. I want to understand what happened.'* That could be a thought that serves you.

And if it's not that, if that doesn't work for you, I'm just making that one up, then find another thought that drives curiosity if that's the emotion that you want to feel. I know that sometimes you need to repress emotions in a pinch. You're in a meeting, someone says something to you, you're surrounded by people and you don't want to show your emotion. You don't have time to process emotions like I just said. I'm not against holding back in emotion and just trying to be calm in a moment to get you through the moment.

But as soon as you're outside of that moment like you're able to go back to your office or whatever, that's where you need to process the emotions. You need to be able to process them because the more you push them down, the more they just build up. And then you're going to explode on someone else for something that they didn't do or you are going to overreact in a situation that doesn't require the kind of reaction that you ended up giving it.

But most of the time, we have time to feel our emotions before we do the next thing. So when you realize that one of your reports has missed a deadline, and you get angry about it, you have time, you literally have the two minutes that it takes for you to ground yourself, feel the emotion, and decide how you want to react before you DM them. And you might be like, *'Oh, DMs have no emotions.'* No, they do. They do. And you know they do. There's the emotions that we put on them. But there's also sometimes the words how we phrase things and how quickly we send them. And certainly, when you're speaking to someone, the emotions come through.

So it's important that you really ground yourself even before you send an email or a DM because what you're doing right now is you're feeling angry. Your whole body is buzzing with anger and then you DM them trying to pick the right words through gritted teeth. And your anger always comes through even when you don't want it to. You get an email from someone, someone says something in a meeting, you get some news about a project going sideways, something gets delayed, or a client asks for something that you didn't want to do. All these situations have emotions that you can deal with before you take action.

I know that people want to go to the one scenario where you're, like I said, in a pinch and you have to repress your emotions. Don't change those scenarios right now. Don't even focus on those scenarios right now. I want you to

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focus on just the scenarios where you have time. Breathe, relax into the emotion, question it, and choose an emotion moving forward. I want you to just focus on those. The more you just focus on those scenarios, the next time that you're in a pinch, you're going to be able to choose your emotion quickly.

But first, you have to get good at it, which takes time, which means really use the time that you have and in some of the situations that I've said you have time to feel your emotions. You don't want to repress emotions that only lead to burnout. It doesn't work, anyway. People can feel them and you're not going to get effective results when you learn to feel through emotion, in addition to getting better results, which I love. This may be more motivating to you to do this.

When you learn to feel through motions, you use up less energy. It's actually less exhausting. Feeling negative emotions takes up a lot of energy. Repressing negative emotions and pretending to be someone else, even more energy. But when you actually just take those two minutes to feel the emotion and do everything I've talked about already, you're less exhausted at the end of the day. You don't burn out; you don't carry grudges; you don't blame people; you don't ruminate in the car on the way home or on the train on the way home about all the things that you're pissed about.

You end up actually liking people more, wanting to work with people more, and you're actually calmer. It feels more natural that you're not getting results through gritted teeth all the time or through force. It doesn't feel forced, it feels easier. It’s so much simpler than carrying around a bunch of negative emotions and constantly repressing them. It actually feels lighter. Like there's not this weight on your shoulders. You get to lead with ease. And that's what all of us want. We want to be able to make it easier for ourselves.

And we think that the best way to do that is for someone to take away the workload, change jobs, or whatever. No, the easiest way to make your job easier is just to feel your emotions and that's going to take away the risk of burnout. Now, don't get me wrong. Time management, workload management, and managing priorities is a big opportunity. I'll do more podcasts on that and it's something I coach my clients on as well. But a much bigger opportunity, even with the workload you have right now is learning to manage your emotional life. And you get to do this for yourself.

You have complete ability and autonomy to make this change in your life. You're not depending on anyone to make this happen for you. You can do this. It’s simple. You just notice your feelings and emotions, notice where the tension is, relax into that tension, and then slow things down enough so you can question the thoughts behind why you're feeling this way.

Once you understand the thoughts behind why you're feeling this way, you can choose whether or not you want to focus on those thoughts, or you want to find a thought that's going to produce a more effective emotion for you. That's it. That's all it takes. It’s so much easier than carrying around anger, frustration, resentment, fear, and whatever else, whatever other suffering that you're creating for yourself at work.

Here's the last thing I want to leave you with today. The consequences of hiding from your emotions are just more emotions. The consequences of hiding from your emotions and the consequences of repressing your emotions is just more emotion. But the emotions that you're creating, these more emotions are very ineffective.

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You're layering on things like exhaustion, worry, judgment, and all that stuff. Learning to feel your emotions is the lightest and easiest way to do your job. And it's the sign of a world-class leader, my friends.

Thanks so much for joining me today. I'll talk to you next week. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

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