

Emotionally Deficient Leaders

Daniel Goleman, a psychologist, and behavioral science journalist popularized emotional intelligence in his 1995 book of the same name. In his explanation of emotional intelligence, Dr. Goleman explained how people can identify and manage their own feelings and how they can recognize and respond to those of others. Real-time performance of what Goleman described is a skill that is hard to master. The truth is many Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) practitioners find some senior leaders to be emotionally deficient. Allow me to explain.

Rufus Miles was a government administrator who spent fifteen years working for the Federal Security Agency and the Health, Education, and Welfare Department. Rufus is largely remembered for coining the phrase, "Where you stand depends on where you sit," alternatively known as Miles Law. Leaders with emotional deficiency cannot sit in the place of the LGBTQ+ community, underrepresented minorities, women, people of color, and people with disabilities. Where they stand is exclusive territory and the less fortunate need not approach. Emotionally deficient leaders are self-centered and tend to measure success in terms of wins and losses.

This is problematic in the EDI space for a number of reasons, chiefly because emotionally deficient leaders are unable to empathize with those who are less privileged. EDI success is tethered to the willingness of the powerful to see themselves in the position of "the other." For organizational equity to be achieved, leaders must be emotionally intelligent.

Nobel Prize-winning economist Daniel Kahneman describes reactionary thinking as "System 1" thinking in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*. In his research, Kahneman found that System 1 thinkers tend to perceive new and unfamiliar things as threats. Consequently, emotionally deficient leaders find EDI programs difficult to embrace, which is why they see them as a burden and not a powerful leadership tool. To effectively treat emotional deficiency and the accompanying symptoms, EDI practitioners should know three things.

Firstly, emotionally deficient leaders may be unaware of their lack of empathy. Leaders who suffer from emotional deficiency are more likely than not to get promoted because they excel at managing abstract ideas, manipulating data, and mesmerizing the masses. Throughout their careers, they have never been held accountable for the inability to empathize with others. A lack of empathy is manifest in many ways, but here are a couple of the most common. Let's start with the inability to appreciate why religious holidays are opposed by some and embraced by others. The refusal to acknowledge that hairstyles differ among ethnic groups and races, which calls for an inclusive hairstyle policy. Leaders who refuse to admit that certain

behaviors in the workplace are just inappropriate and offensive, regardless of their intent. Leaders exhibiting these symptoms are suffering from emotional deficiency.

A second thing the practitioner must know is this. Emotional deficiency occurs when leaders refuse to acknowledge that racism, homophobia, and sexism occur under their leadership. Rather than empathizing with the alleged target, the leader defends the actions of the perpetrator or worse, speaks to the target in a way that makes the target regret filing a complaint. If an EDI practitioner experiences this type of leadership, they must take immediate action to address the signs and symptoms of emotional deficiency.

The third and finally thing an EDI practitioner must know is that some emotional deficient leaders are asymptomatic. This rare type of leader says all of the right things, and on the surface appears supportive of the EDI program. Overtime, their true intentions are revealed when it becomes evident that their actions and rhetoric are not congruent. EDI practitioners must be cognizant of the signs and symptoms of emotional deficient leaders and take swift and immediate actions when confronted with them. In conclusion, failure to address emotional deficient leaders can result in a poorly supported EDI program, and a burned out, overworked and underappreciated EDI practitioner. Take my advice my friends, ignoring this problem, will not make it go away.

-Richard Pete Hill