

# DAY 1 DISCOVERY ASSIGNMENT: MEDITATION READING

## Leadership Development Through Emotional Intelligence and Meditation

September 08, 2014 - by *Maynard Brusman*

**The greatest obstacle to leading others is lack of self-knowledge and inner focus.**

James," the director of human resources of a Silicon Valley high-tech company, was concerned about the senior vice president, "Mike," who was struggling for solutions. Mike had been described as very bright, but with limited experience leading a management team.

His major sources of stress were interpersonal conflict and providing exceptional customer service in a dynamic and high-pressure environment. Since Mike had had limited experience leading management teams, it was necessary to evaluate and develop his leadership skills and emotional intelligence (EI) in dealing with stressful situations.

As an executive coach experienced in EI, I was hired to work with Mike as part of a six-month executive coaching and leadership development program. I helped him develop EI skills and introduced him to mindfulness meditation, which provided an effective method to reduce stress and improve focus.

### EI and Leadership Development

According to Steven Stein, CEO of Multi-Health Systems, "Emotional intelligence is made up of a specific set of observable and measurable emotional and social skills that impact the way people perceive and express themselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges, and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way."

The EQ-i 2.0 developed by Multi-Health Systems was the first scientifically validated measure of EI. It was developed to help leaders assess and develop the requisite EI skills.

To be effective in the workplace, leaders need to measure and develop their EI. They need to be self-aware of their own emotions and clearly understand their strengths and weaknesses. This understanding helps them stay in control of situations and avoid emotionally charged behaviors and decisions. With my assistance, James's goal was to help improve Mike's leadership capability and EI skills, manage his stress, and equip him with tools for conflict management.

To begin the program, Mike completed the EQ-i 2.0 assessment. In addition, an EQ 360 multi-rater assessment was completed by his manager, peers, and subordinates, which provided insight regarding their perceptions of him.

Mike's EQ-i 2.0 score on stress tolerance was in the low midrange. He was having difficulty withstanding the most intense workplace pressures, showing a lack of agility in coping with challenging issues (for example, layoffs and competitive threats). Mike was viewed by his multi-raters as lacking composure in difficult situations, and not being decisive when encountering complex issues or stressful events.

Overwhelmed by stressful circumstances, Mike was having trouble finding solutions that would drive the organization forward. To help develop his leadership competencies, I suggested these strategies:

- » Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.
- » Develop realistic goals.
- » Take decisive actions rather than detaching completely from problems.

<https://www.td.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2014/09/Leadership-Development-Through-EI-and-Meditation> Source: Association for Talent Development (ATD formerly ASTD) Website

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- » Look for opportunities for self-discovery and reflection, particularly in uncertain times.
- » Nurture a positive view of yourself; develop confidence in your ability to solve problems.
- » Keep things in perspective.
- » Maintain a positive outlook.
- » Pay attention to your emotional and physical well-being; engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- » Engage colleagues and direct reports in coaching conversations revolved around purpose and aligned values.

### Mindfulness Meditation

The greatest obstacle to managing others is lack of self-awareness and the inability to self-manage. Mindfulness involves awareness, attention, and energy. Learning to become more present can free someone to be more flexible and creative. It reduces stress and promotes resilience, enjoying better health and well-being.

Mindfulness meditation is when an individual takes time to sit still for 20 minutes or longer to observe her thoughts without judgment and slowly dismiss them, then focuses on breathing.

Becoming a mindful and emotionally intelligent leader requires an individual to explore the intimacy of sitting still and learning how such a simple act can transform her complicated, demanding workplace. Meditation and mindfulness are invitations to become a more inspiring leader who people want to follow.

Along with developing his EI skills, Mike began practicing meditation. He focused on the breath for five minutes each day and increased the time by five minutes each week until he was able to sit for 20 minutes.

### The Result

Mike fully engaged in biweekly, two-hour coaching sessions. Toward the end of the six-month coaching program, he participated in a follow-up EQ 360 to measure his progress.

Scores on the EQ 360 stress tolerance competency had improved to the high midrange. He was now frequently drawing on his repertoire of effective coping strategies and better able to stay composed and manage his emotions.

Mike's executive team peers rated him more engaged and collaborative. The CEO's feedback suggested that Mike was more resonant, coping with challenges better, and had grown into his leadership role. James also observed the increase in Mike's stress tolerance, and optimism scores were reflected in his reinvigorated contributions to the company's strategy and vision initiatives.

Mike learned to be more mindful, optimistic, and less stressed, and was more engaged with his senior team. He practiced meditation on a daily basis to focus his mind and enhance his creativity. He fully embraced the mindfulness and emotional intelligence best practices based on the EQ-i 2.0 competencies.

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