

## Three Things Leaders Need to Focus On

“A primary task of leadership is to direct attention,” says emotional-intelligence guru Daniel Goleman (Rutgers University) in this thoughtful Harvard Business Review article. “To do so, leaders must learn to focus their own attention... an inward focus, a focus on others, and an outward focus... [A] failure to focus inward leaves you rudderless, a failure to focus on others renders you clueless, and a failure to focus outward may leave you blindsided.” Mastering these three is especially important in organizations where leaders are flooded with information and demands on their time. As Nobel economist Herbert Simon put it, “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.”

**Focusing on yourself** – Self-awareness is the starting point of emotional intelligence, says Goleman. First, it means listening to your “gut” – your intuitive sense of what’s right and wrong – but balancing that with real-world data. A study of investment bankers in the U.K. found that those who were most successful balanced intuition with analytics. Second, it means putting together a coherent picture of our authentic selves. “To be authentic is to be the same person to others as you are to yourself,” says Goleman. “In part that entails paying attention to what others think of you, particularly people whose opinions you esteem and who will be candid in their feedback.” That may involve actively reaching out for feedback, since not everyone tells us what we need to hear. A third aspect is what Goleman calls “cognitive control” – being able to resist temptation and distraction, stay focused on a goal, and “stay calm in a crisis, tame their own agitation, and recover from a debacle or defeat.”

**Focusing on others** – The key to not being clueless in relationships is empathy – cognitive empathy (being curious about and able to understand another person’s perspective); emotional empathy (being able to feel what someone else feels); and empathetic concern (being able to sense what another person needs from you). Studies have shown that managers’ empathy skills tend to degrade as they rise up through the ranks, so it takes a concerted effort to keep all three types of empathy working well.

**Focusing on the wider world** – “Leaders with a strong outward focus are not only good listeners but also good questioners,” says Goleman. “To sustain the outward focus that leads to innovation, we need some uninterrupted time in which to reflect and refresh our focus... First we prepare our minds by gathering a wide variety of pertinent information, and then we alternate between concentrating intently on the problem

and letting our minds wander freely... (That's why so many fresh ideas come to people in the shower or out for a walk or a run.)"

"The Focused Leader" by Daniel Goleman in Harvard Business Review, December 2013 (Vol. 91, #12, p. 50-60)