

MANAGING YOURSELF

We Need More Mature Leaders

by [Richard Davis](#)

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“My idea is better.”

“Is not.”

“If we don’t use my idea, I’m not playing!”

“Fine, I don’t like you anymore.”

An argument among six-graders in the schoolyard? Unfortunately not. In the past few months we’ve seen the attitude above reflected in the halls of government and corporate boardrooms across the country. Arrogance, pouting, tantrums, personal attacks, and betrayal of trust seem to be the order of the day. Situations at Hewlett-Packard, Yahoo!, and News Corp demonstrate the kind of sandbox leadership that is all too prevalent right now. The timing could not be worse. The nation’s current problems, as vast and overwhelming as they are, appear secondary to the whims of spoiled children, unwilling to play well together. At a time when we need solid, grounded leadership more than ever, we seem to be in short supply of adults who act like, well...like adults.

This bad behavior is not necessarily a new thing. Decorum, self-control, compromise and honor have been found lacking in both the political realm and the c-suite before. And to be fair, many leaders – I would even say the majority – are honest, hard-working, dedicated individuals. But just as grains of sand that find their way into a grist mill make the bread inedible, the leadership that’s getting attention in both the private and public sector today is equally poisonous.

To put it simply, we need more mature leaders – now.

Maturity is experience-driven perspective and awareness of your emotional patterns and triggers. It is the ability to suppress impulse and master emotional reactions. Many of our leaders today have other excellent leadership skills, but only a remarkable few are able to control their

impulses and put others' needs first.

The key is control. Every day, we are confronted with decisions that have short-and long-term implications. Mature adults can fend off short-term impulses by keeping the long-term in view; this is what helps them stay in control.

Similarly, the best leaders I have worked with are masters of their emotions. They rein them in when the situation demands it, or let loose when it will have maximum impact. At times, you need to be still and impenetrable; in other moments, you need to be able to pound your fist on the table. It is not whether you are typically a calm or intense person. It is your ability to gain mastery over your emotional tendencies and reactions. You must develop the ability to fit the emotion to the demands of the situation. Either way, you remain in control.

This isn't easy, and executive maturity takes time to accrue – though we've seen it doesn't always come with experience. Regardless, whether you are a current CEO or an aspiring one, there are ways to accelerate this ability intentionally.

Know your triggers. Leaders are sometimes consumed with so many day-to-day responsibilities that they rarely stop to reflect on how and what they react to. But understanding your own triggers and vulnerabilities is a must – you need to recognize the kinds of events that bring out the worst in you. Think about the times you've flown off the handle or lost control. What set you off? Think about the vices you have and the opportunities that would lead to indiscretion. Be realistic. Then look for the subtle signals people give off in response to your behavior. If you don't like what you see – you are at risk.

Assemble a “personal board of directors.” Everyone needs to vent. Find a person or group of people you can trust to share your feelings and experiences with honestly so that you don't snap and get defensive under pressure – and publicly. If you can't find these people in your organization (and many leaders cannot), look elsewhere in your personal network for those who will both listen to your frustrations and give you honest feedback about how you're being perceived when you show your emotions.

Define your personal code. Maturity is expressed through your judgment – what you decide and how you react. One of the best things you can do to enhance your judgment is to define your personal code, or your fundamental beliefs about work and life. Take a moment to write down

five things you believe in as a leader. Share your list with the people who report to you. Think about how powerful it would be for your people to understand what you believe in at your core, and what behavior is acceptable under your leadership.

Leaders who put their own gratification above the needs of others lack the ability to see the long-term consequences of their actions. This does not bode well for them, the economy, or our country. It's time we start counting emotional maturity and control among the "must-haves" for leaders everywhere.

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