

SPECIAL EDITION

# AN EMPATHETIC

# CEO

**20 tips for elevating your  
emotional intelligence as a leader**

By Omar Halabieh and Arjun Vir Singh



# INTRODUCTION

It's not every day you hear of a CEO of a large company working side-by-side with entry-level employees on the front line - interacting with consumers, serving the consumers and doing it all without letting anyone else know that he is the CEO.



Photo: Starbucks incoming Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Laxman Narasimhan has announced that he is now barista certified.

This is not mystery shopping but something completely different. Experts suggest that this unusual idea isn't just brilliant--it's emotionally intelligent too: **using the power of emotions to support employees, learn from customers, and run a better business.**

Taking the above as a source of inspiration, Omar and I arrived at a list of **20 tips** (not intending to be exhaustive) **for CEOs and senior leaders to elevate their emotional intelligence.** By implementing these emotionally intelligent tips, we believe that leaders can foster a more empowered and productive workforce. Additionally, this approach will enable them to gain valuable insights directly from their customers, resulting in **enhanced performance and success for their businesses.**

Wherever possible we have cited examples of leaders from across different sectors who have applied those emotionally intelligent techniques and habits to achieve the desired outcome.

## **Arjun Vir Singh**

Podcast Host - Couchonomics with Arjun  
Author - Couchonomics Crunch  
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## Empathetic Listening

Practice active listening to foster better relationships and problem-solving.

Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

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Stephen R. Covey  
Author and Businessman

### Tip 01

Use techniques like summarizing and asking open-ended questions.

## Encourage Open Communication

Create a trusting, collaborative environment by being transparent and seeking feedback.

Two-way communication is essential to building trust and engagement. Encourage open dialogue, listen carefully, and be responsive.

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John C. Maxwell  
Leadership Expert and Author

### Tip 02

Hold regular town hall meetings.





## Constructive Feedback

Help employees grow and succeed by providing specific, actionable, and timely feedback.

Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish.

Sam Walton  
Founder of Walmart

### Tip 03

Use the SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact) model to provide feedback.

## Show Appreciation

Boost morale and job satisfaction by consistently recognizing employees' achievements.

Everyone wants to be appreciated, so if you appreciate someone, don't keep it a secret.

Mary Kay Ash  
Founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics

### Tip 04

Implement a peer-to-peer recognition program.



## Develop Emotional Self-Awareness

Enhance decision-making and relationships by understanding one's emotions.

You can't make a good decision with bad data, and your emotions are the data of your life.

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Ray Dalio  
Founder, Bridgewater Associates

### Tip 05

Practice daily mindfulness meditation.

## Promote a Healthy Work-Life Balance

Support employee well-being and productivity by implementing policies that promote balance.

We need to do a better job of putting ourselves higher on our own 'to do' list.

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John C. Maxwell  
Leadership Expert and Author

### Tip 06

Encourage "mental health days".



## Foster a Collaborative Environment

Promote teamwork, innovation, and shared problem-solving by breaking down silos and encouraging open communication.

None of us is as smart as all of us.

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Ken Blanchard  
Management Expert and Author

### Tip 07

Implement regular cross-functional team meetings to share ideas and perspectives.

## Encourage Continuous Learning

Support employee development through skill-building, cross-functional training, and ongoing education.

Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.

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William Pollard  
Physicist and Episcopal Priest

### Tip 08

Offer internal and external training and development.



## Practice Humility

Create a culture that empowers risk-taking and innovation by admitting mistakes, seeking feedback, and learning from experiences.

Great leaders are willing to be challenged and are open to learning.

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Indra Nooyi  
Former CEO of PepsiCo

### Tip 09

Encourage a "no-blame" culture where your team can openly discuss failures and lessons learned.

## Develop Resilience

Inspire perseverance and adaptability by maintaining a positive outlook, learning from experiences, and staying focused on long-term goals.

Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to thrive.

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Jamais Cascio  
Futurist and Author

### Tip 10

Share stories of overcoming challenges and setbacks within the organization.



## Emphasize Values and Purpose

Create a sense of shared vision and commitment by clearly communicating the company's purpose and values.

To succeed in your mission, you must have single-minded devotion to your goal.

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam  
Former President of India

### Tip 11

Regularly reinforce how employees' roles contribute to the organization's larger goals, vision and mission.

## Be Adaptable and Flexible

Stay open to change and respond effectively to new challenges and opportunities.

Adaptability is about the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win.

Max McKeown  
Author and Strategist

### Tip 12

Encourage a culture of experimentation and iterative improvements.



## Encourage Diversity and Inclusion

Drive innovation and creativity by valuing diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences.

Diversity is not just about race and gender, but also about diversity of thought.

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Ginni Rometty  
Former CEO of IBM

### Tip 13

Implement diversity and inclusion training programs for employees and managers.

## Practice Empathy In Decision-Making

Make informed and compassionate decisions by understanding the needs, feelings, and perspectives of those affected.

Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.

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Oprah Winfrey  
Media Executive & Philanthropist

### Tip 14

Be mindful of potential emotional impacts while making decisions.



## Cultivate Trust

Build strong relationships with employees by being transparent, accountable, and reliable.

Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.

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Stephen R. Covey  
Author and Businessman

### Tip 15

Regularly share updates on company progress and decisions to maintain transparency.

## Show Vulnerability

Foster trust, empathy, and understanding by admitting mistakes, asking for help, and expressing emotions.

Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.

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Brené Brown  
Researcher and Author

### Tip 16

Share personal challenges and experiences to create authentic connections with employees.



## Engage with Frontline Employees

Gain valuable insights and foster unity by connecting with employees at all levels.

You can't build a great company without walking in your employees' shoes.

Richard Branson  
Founder of Virgin Group

### Tip 17

Schedule regular visits and interactions with frontline team members across sites.

## Prioritize the Well-Being of Employees

Support mental and physical well-being through programs, policies, and wellness initiatives.

Well-being is at the heart of all great companies. You can't have a healthy business without healthy employees.

Arianna Huffington  
Co-Founder, The Huffington Post

### Tip 18

Offer mental health resources and stress management workshops.





## Practice Servant Leadership

Empower and support employees by putting their needs and well-being first.

The best leaders are those most interested in surrounding themselves with assistants and associates smarter than they are.

John C. Maxwell  
Leadership Expert and Author

### Tip 19

Encourage employee development through mentoring and coaching opportunities.

## Develop a Growth Mindset

Encourage innovation, adaptability, and resilience by promoting a culture of continuous learning and celebrating effort.

In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow.

Carol Dweck  
Psychologist and Author

### Tip 20

Provide regular constructive feedback on growth and celebrate learnings from both successes and failures.



## Key Takeaways

Empathetic Listening

Encourage Continuous Learning

Cultivate Trust

Encourage Open Communication

Practice Humility

Show Vulnerability

Constructive Feedback

Develop Resilience

Engage with Frontline Employees

Show Appreciation

Emphasize Values and Purpose

Prioritize the Well-Being of Employees

Develop Emotional Self-Awareness

Be Adaptable and Flexible

Practice Servant Leadership

Promote a Healthy Work-Life Balance

Encourage Diversity and Inclusion

Develop a Growth Mindset

Foster a Collaborative Environment

Practice Empathy In Decision-Making



An empathetic CEO values emotional intelligence and invests in developing a compassionate leadership approach. They build trust through vulnerability, active listening, and humility, promoting open communication. Such leaders prioritize long-term sustainability and social responsibility over short-term gains, aligning with the values of an increasingly conscious workforce and consumer base.

Emphatic CEOs create a supportive environment where employees feel valued, respected, and understood, fostering collaboration and human connection. This approach boosts employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention while driving innovation and business success.

In today's fast-paced and increasingly aware world, empathetic CEOs stand out as a beacon of hope and inspiration for the future of leadership, showcasing the transformative potential of compassionate leadership and human connection.

