



The Human Side of Leadership

## BEHAVIORS THAT BUILD (OR BREAK) WORKPLACES





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## The Emotionally Intelligent Leader:

# READING THE ROOM, LEADING THE MOMENT

As a consultant, I've learned that you can sense a lot the moment you walk into a room full of leaders. Some are brimming with energy, others quietly holding back, and a few carrying visible stress on their shoulders. What separates the leaders who connect deeply with their teams from those who don't is usually one thing: emotional intelligence (EI). It's not a "nice to have", it's the skill that shapes trust, morale, and ultimately, performance.

I often notice that emotionally intelligent leaders don't just focus on what is being said, they tune into how it's being said. They notice the pause before someone answers, the hesitation in tone, or even the silence in a room. While some leaders rush to push the agenda forward, those with strong EI pause, ask, "What's on your mind?" and open the door for real conversations and collaboration.

## COMMON EI GAPS IN LEADERS

Across industries, some patterns keep coming up:

**Misinterpreting tone, especially in virtual settings.**



**Jumping into "fix-it" mode without listening fully.**



**Responding defensively to feedback.**



A leader who prides themselves on being decisive might unknowingly come across as dismissive. Once they slow down, ask for input, and validate their team's perspective, people feel respected and motivated to contribute.

## QUICK SELF-CHECK

To evaluate your own EI, reflect on simple prompts:

- ☐ Do I pause before reacting in high-pressure moments?
- ☐ Am I listening to understand, or just to reply?
- ☐ When disagreements arise, do I acknowledge emotions alongside facts?
- ☐ Do I invite feedback not only on results but also on my leadership style?
- ☐ Do I go reflect on a conflict and think about what I could have done better/differently?

## BUILDING YOUR ACTION PLAN

The leaders who excel at EI practice a few habits:



**Pause before responding: a few seconds can prevent a reactive reply.**



**Listen actively: reflect on what you hear before giving solutions.**



**Validate emotions: phrases like "I can see this feels frustrating" or "Can I think about this and get back to you?" can defuse tension.**



**Seek feedback regularly: not just on outcomes, but on leadership presence.**

Emotional intelligence isn't just about being "kind" or "empathetic." It's about turning silence into openness, stress into clarity, and disconnection into trust. And when leaders do that consistently, they create teams that thrive not only on performance, but also on connection.

**Radhika Dahiya**  
Associate Consultant



## CONFLICT WITHOUT CASUALTIES:

# RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS



How do you respond when conflict arises at work? Do you step back, give way, push firmly, split the difference, or seek a joint solution? The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is widely used because it captures five common approaches in a clear and practical framework. Each style has its place, but the outcome depends on how it is applied.

### 01 | Avoiding – Step back to cool down

**When it works best:** When emotions are running high and pushing forward would make the situation worse.

**Objective:** Diffuse tension so people can return with a clearer head.

**Micro skill – Emotion Acknowledgement:** Naming feelings openly helps release tension.

**Example:** The manager says, *"I can hear this is getting heated. Let us pause here and pick it up tomorrow."* Pausing lowers the temperature and allows a reset.

### 02 | Accommodating – Preserve the relationship

**When it works best:** When the issue matters more to the other person than to you.

**Objective:** Maintain goodwill at low personal cost while avoiding silent resentment.

**Micro skill – Empathic Listening + Boundary-Setting:** Acknowledge their priority while keeping your own needs visible.

**Example:** In budget planning, you see that your colleague's need is more urgent. *"I understand this campaign is critical and I support the extra allocation this round. Next quarter, let's also revisit operations funding so efficiency improvements are not overlooked."*

### 03 | Competing – Be clear and firm

**When it works best:** When safety, ethics, or compliance are at stake and compromise is not possible.

**Objective:** Protect critical standards with a decisive outcome.

**Micro skill – "I" Statements + Referencing Standards:** Avoid accusatory "You" language. Use "I" statements and reference policies to hold the line without blame.

**Example:** When a team member proposes skipping a safety step, the manager states, *"I cannot approve this without the safety check. Our policy requires it, even if it delays the release."*

### 04 | Compromising – Find workable middle ground

**When it works best:** When both sides have valid needs, but progress matters more than perfection.

**Objective:** Reach a fair trade that moves things forward.

**Micro skill – Summarizing and Clarifying:** Restating both sides' needs signals fairness and prepares the ground for a balanced solution.

**Example:** While arguing over deadlines, one needs testing time, the other must meet an executive deadline, the manager acknowledges & then proposes a balanced option. Recognizing both interests makes the compromise feel fair.

### 05 | Collaborating – Create a stronger solution together

**When it works best:** For complex, high-stakes issues requiring creativity and buy-in.

**Objective:** Develop a robust solution that meets core needs.

**Micro skill – Reframing:** Shift the focus to shared goals and invite contributions to unlock real collaboration.

**Example:** A leader calls for collaboration: *"Our shared goals are quality and budget control. What ideas could help us achieve both?"* Ideas flow, and the final plan blends contributions from across the team.



**Ines Wong**  
Senior Consultant



## TRUST CAPITAL:

# THE LEADERSHIP CURRENCY THAT NEVER DEPRECIATES

Trust is a leader's greatest intangible asset, often shaping outcomes more than strategy or reports. It builds influence faster than authority ever could, and when nurtured consistently, becomes the foundation for long-term success. Leaders trade daily in this currency – trust capital.

Trust grows through consistent actions, clear communication, and integrity in moments that matter. Here's how leaders can strengthen this essential asset.

## THE DO'S: HOW TO GROW YOUR TRUST CAPITAL

### • Deliver on Commitments

Every promise, big or small, is a deposit into your trust account. A sales leader committed to securing analysts for a high-value client pitch and followed through by reallocating talent, earning credibility with both team and client.

### • Be Transparent About Limitations

Admitting what you don't know demonstrates confidence. A compliance head acknowledged being unprepared for sudden regulatory changes and laid out a clear roadmap. Leaders' candour rallied employees and reassured clients, turning uncertainty into renewed trust.

### • Admit Mistakes Quickly

Leaders who own missteps create cultures where learning is valued. A project manager in a tech firm corrected a timeline error in a cross-functional call and shared a revised plan. Rather than losing confidence, the team appreciated the honesty and stayed aligned.

### • Protect Confidentiality

Safeguarding sensitive information signals respect. In employee listening sessions, leaders who ensured private feedback stayed within the room saw higher participation and stronger trust over time.

## THE DON'TS: BEHAVIOURS THAT DRAIN TRUST

### • Overpromise Under Pressure

Short-term approval often leads to long-term damage. A tech leader promised aggressive bonuses without budget approval. When the truth surfaced, attrition spiked and influence waned.

### • Withhold Critical Information

When leaders keep restructuring plans under wraps, employees inevitably hear through rumours, leading to disengagement and anxiety.

### • Shift Blame

Passing responsibility to other departments in front of clients may protect face in the moment but erodes both credibility and teamwork.

### • Play Favourites

A financial manager repeatedly assigned high-visibility projects to the same few, leaving others sidelined. The result: declining morale and reduced initiative.

Trust multiplies influence. It accelerates collaboration, strengthens client partnerships, and stabilizes organizations through crises. Once lost, no amount of authority can buy it back.

**Divya Khanna**

Director – Client Relationship Management





## Boundaries Without Guilt: -----

# THE BEHAVIOUR SHIFT THAT SAVES CAREERS

Ever felt your day vanish in a flood of tasks that weren't really yours? I know I have. With the best intentions, I've agreed to help on "just one more thing," only to find myself working late, drained, and behind on my own priorities. Over time, I've realized overcommitment doesn't make us more capable - it chips away at focus, energy, and even the joy we take in our work.

In fast-paced workplaces, it's easy to believe that saying "yes" makes us more reliable. But the truth is, boundaries aren't selfish - they're a smart productivity tool. They allow us to deliver quality over quantity, prevent burnout, and create the space for our best work to shine.

## SIGNS YOU MIGHT NEED STRONGER BOUNDARIES

- Skipping breaks or meals because you're finishing "just one more task."
- Feeling a little resentful when new requests keep landing on your plate.
- Checking messages constantly to stay on top of demands.
- Saying "yes" instantly, then regretting it later.
- Working late - not for deadlines, but to catch up on extra tasks.
- Losing track of your own goals while handling everyone else's priorities.

## BEHAVIOUR SHIFTS THAT HELP

- Pause before committing: A simple "let me check and get back to you" can buy breathing space.
- Offer alternatives: "I can take this up after finishing X" or "Y might be able to help too."
- Block focus time: Put it on your calendar like any other meeting and protect it.
- Delegate with trust: Sharing ownership not only frees you, it builds others' confidence too.
- Schedule recovery: Even 10-15 minutes between back-to-backs can reset your energy.
- Protect personal rhythms: If you're sharpest in the morning, safeguard that time for high-value tasks.

## REFLECTION PROMPTS

- Which commitments genuinely energize me?
- Which ones drain me most?
- Where can I create space for work that truly matters?
- What boundary can I set to make this week less stressful?



**Sufiya Suhail**  
Associate Consultant

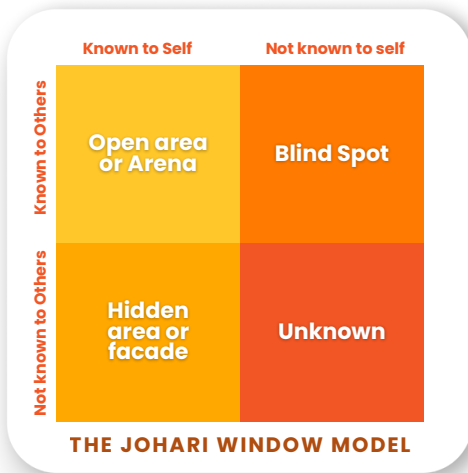




## Behavioural Blind Spots

# HOW TO DETECT AND OVERCOME THEM FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

I first learned about the term “blind spots” when I was in driving school. My driving coach told me about “blind spots” of the mirrors, which were supposed to give me a “full picture” of my surroundings. He showed them to me during practice and then he instructed me to do “shoulder check” whenever I wanted to make a change of direction. The second time I heard about “blind spots” was when I was in my social work Counseling Psychology class – the Johari Window which shows 4 quadrants of a window:



“Blind spot” is defined as “Known to others and not known to self” in one’s behaviors. On the other hand, the “Unknown” areas could also be understood as “blind spots” because they are unknown to self and others.

When I was young, I played a group game in which the members had stickers on their backs. The stickers had photos of different animals and one of them was a turtle. The one who had the turtle sticker was often laughed at, but he didn’t know why they were laughing at him until they showed him the sticker on his back. In the real world behavioural blind spots could be temper,

micro-management, control, procrastination, avoidance, arrogance, timidity, communication problems, conflicts, harassment, discrimination, and many others. Those behaviors could be influenced by their personalities and motivations in money, sex, and power. If the blind spots are known to others, they could give the person feedback honestly with care or the person humbly seeks for others’ feedback for growth and learning. However, this is easier said than done.

In an organization there must be “psychological safety” and “trust” before constructive criticism can be delivered privately or openly. The person who has the blind spots must be humble and open to listen to the others. Otherwise, their natural responses could be defensiveness, argument, counterattacks, passive aggressiveness, withdrawal, and depression instead of reflection and learning. Managers need to learn how to give constructive feedback and performance coaching while bringing to awareness the behavioral blind spots.

The fourth quadrant, the “Unknown”, could be the most difficult one to detect and manage. Those blind spots could be hidden in their personalities and the dynamics/cultures of the team. They could also be the “Pink Elephant” in the room, but everyone keeps silent about it as if it is not there. Personality tests such as **Leadership Potential Evaluation (LPE)** have the built-in psychometric processes to detect “blind spots” in different leadership behaviors. Team assessment tools such as **Management Drive (MD)** can also point out not only the individuals’ blind spots, but also the team behavioral blind spots and cultural hiccups. Finally, leadership coaching and team coaching could be used to detect and manage behavioral blind spots through interactions and dialogues.

Do the “shoulder check” and make the change happen!

**Eric Kung**

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