



Five of the Hardest “Soft Skills” Every Leader Must Demonstrate

1. Authenticity & Transparency

Without a transparent and authentic leadership environment, trust is hard to come by, leading to feelings of insecurity, lower retention, and performance issues.

2. Cultural Competence

Defined as the ability to interact effectively in cross-culture situations. It means understanding different cultures and their values, even if they do not align with our own. Building cultural competence is a journey. Consider taking the [Intercultural Development Inventory Assessment](#) to assist you in your journey.

3. Emotional Intelligence

Defined as the ability to recognize, regulate, and convey your own emotions and to conduct interpersonal relationships with awareness and empathy of another’s emotional state.

According to Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who helped popularize the term, emotional intelligence has several components:

- **Self-awareness:** Paying attention to your own emotions; knowing your triggers; noting your strengths and weaknesses; possessing humility.
- **Self-regulation:** Remaining calm in emotionally fraught situations; controlling your own behavior despite your emotional state; admitting your mistakes and taking accountability.
- **Motivation:** Knowing why your work is important to you; affirming your values and acting in alignment with them; remaining optimistic, especially when doing so is difficult.

Leaders can demonstrate emotional intelligence by:

- Offering support and empathy to your staff and colleagues
- Getting to know your employees on a more personal level
- Actively request and listen to feedback
- Maintain emotional awareness and wellness.



4. Empathy

Defined as the ability to empathize and understand others. Being able to approach others with kindness and acceptance can inspire and foster positive work relationships. Empathy shows vulnerability, which makes leaders approachable and more relatable.

Empathetic response examples:

"Thank you for sharing that experience with me. I can imagine how difficult that would be. I understand the concerns and frustrations that you mentioned and here to support you and help you determine the best course of action."

"I recall being a new hire and feeling overwhelmed as well. This is common for many of our new hires, so I do understand how you feel. Let's take some time to have a quick training session to help you out and get you up to speed."

5. Trust Building

A high-trust organization is one in which employees feel safe to take risks, express themselves freely, and innovate.

The following six strategies can be used to build trust:

- **Communicating clearly, openly, and honestly** is one of the most effective ways to establish and enhance trust.
- **Leading by example and walking the talk.** There is nothing more damaging to trust than to say one thing and do another. This also gets to the heart of integrity.
- **Treating others with respect** is a 'must' for building trust.
- **Showing civility** (being polite and courteous, accepting differences of opinion, using an appropriate tone and inclusive language).
- **Following through on commitments.**
- **Owning up to your mistakes** and avoiding finger pointing and blaming.