There have been many models and ways in which to explore Emotional Intelligence (EQ) over the years. The 6 Seconds organization has developed a simple 3 step model that have direct actions to take to continually develop your EQ. This information was retrieved from 6seconds.org.

The Six Seconds Model of EQ
The Six Seconds model turns emotional intelligence theory into practice for your personal and professional life.

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to blend thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions — which is key to having a successful relationship with yourself and others. To provide a practical and simple way to learn and practice emotional intelligence, Six Seconds developed a three-part model in 1997 as a process – an action plan for using emotional intelligence in daily life.

This model of EQ-in-Action begins with three important pursuits: to become more aware (noticing what you do), more intentional (doing what you mean), and more purposeful (doing it for a reason).

Know Yourself
Clearly seeing what you feel and do.
Emotions are data, and these competencies allow you to accurately collect that information.

Choose Yourself
Doing what you mean to do.
Instead of reacting “on autopilot,” these competencies allow you to proactively respond.

Give Yourself
Doing it for a reason.
These competencies help you put your vision and mission into action so you lead on purpose and with full integrity.
**Know Yourself** gives you the “what” – when you Know Yourself, you know your strengths and challenges, you know what you are doing, what you want, and what to change.

**Choose Yourself** provides the “how” – it shows you how to take action, how to influence yourself and others, how to “operationalize” these concepts.

**Give Yourself** delivers the “why” – when you Give Yourself you are clear and full of energy so you stay focused why to respond a certain way, why to move in a new direction, and why others should come on board.

You’ll notice we present the model in a CIRCLE – it’s not a list, it’s a process! The process works when you spin it, like a propeller moving a ship. As you move through these three pursuits you gain positive momentum!

---

**WATCH** this short (5:35 min) video to learn more about the model from CEO, Joshua Freedman.
*Click the play button to open the YouTube video.*

---

**What Do You Think?**
*Take a couple minutes and capture some notes to help prepare for our workshop together.*

1. What new insights or ideas do you have based on the 6seconds.org model of Emotional Intelligence?

2. On a scale of 1 – 10, how might you rate your current capability of putting this model into practice?

3. What do you imagine could be possible if you, and those you worked most closely with, could continue to develop your skills in EQ?

4. What questions were prompted as your read and watched the pre-work materials?
For close to two years, leaders have been thrust into the role of Counselor in Chief, helping teams recover from the grief and loss of the pandemic, buoying the declining mental health of their employees, being sensitive to people’s anxieties and often publicly sharing their own vulnerabilities along the way. In short, they have been shouldering a big emotional burden.

Of course, this kind of empathy is important for good leadership. But too much of it can be a problem, weighing you down. So when we tell leaders that, actually, they don’t have to take the difficulties of the people they lead onto themselves, this is a huge burden lifted off their shoulders.

Instead of carrying that burden of empathy, you can learn to experience the uplifted experience of compassion. This is a massive shift in how leaders engage with their teams, a shift that greatly benefits all sides. It begins with understanding the difference between empathy and compassion.

**Empathy and Compassion: What’s the Difference?**

Let’s start with some definitions. The words “empathy” and “compassion,” as well as “sympathy,” are sometimes used interchangeably. They all represent positive, altruistic traits, but they don’t refer to the exact same experience. It is helpful to consider the two distinct qualities of compassion: understanding what another is feeling, and the willingness to act to alleviate suffering for another. The following image visually distinguishes compassion from the similar experiences of empathy, sympathy, and pity.
At the bottom left, we have pity. When we experience pity, we have little willingness to act and little understanding of another’s experience. We simply feel sorry for them. Moving up the chart to the right, we experience sympathy. There is a small increase in our willingness to help and our understanding of the other. We feel for the other person.

Moving up one more level, we come to empathy. With empathy, we have a close, visceral understanding of the other person’s experience. We feel with the person. We literally take on the emotions of the other person and make those feelings our own. Though a noble thing to do, it does not necessarily help the other person, except for possibly making them feel less lonely in their experience.

Finally, at the top right, we have a good understanding of what the other person is experiencing and a willingness to act. Our understanding of the other person’s experience is greater than with empathy because we pull on our emotional awareness as well as rational understanding. Compassion occurs when we take a step away from empathy and ask ourselves what we can do to support the person who is suffering. In this way, compassion is an intention versus an emotion.
Why Does This Matter?

Paul Polman, former CEO of Unilever, puts it this way: “If I led with empathy, I would never be able to make a single decision. Why? Because with empathy, I mirror the emotions of others, which makes it impossible to consider the greater good.”

Paul is right. Even with its many benefits, empathy can be a poor guide for leaders.

Empathy often helps us do what’s right, but it also sometimes motivates us to do what’s wrong. Research by Paul Bloom, professor of cognitive science and psychology at Yale University and author of Against Empathy, discovered that empathy can distort our judgment. In his study, two groups of people listened to the recording of a terminally ill boy describing his pain. One group was asked to identify with, and feel for, the boy. The other group was instructed to listen objectively and not engage emotionally. After listening to the recording, each person was asked whether they would move the boy up a prioritized treatment list managed by medical doctors. In the emotional group, three-quarters of participants decided to move him up the list against the opinion of medical professionals, potentially putting sicker individuals at risk. In the objective group, only one-third of the participants made the same recommendation.

As leaders, empathy may cloud our judgment, encourage bias, and make us less effective at making wise decisions. However, it should not be completely avoided. A leader without empathy is like an engine without a spark plug — it simply won’t engage. Empathy is essential for connection and then we can leverage the spark to lead with compassion.

And herein lies the challenge for most leaders: we tend to get trapped by our empathy, making us unable to shift to compassion.

Avoiding the Empathy Trap — and Leading with Compassion

Overcoming an empathetic hijack is a critical skill for any leader. In mastering this skill, you must remember that shifting away from empathy does not make you less human or less kind. Rather, it makes you better able to support people during difficult times. Here are six key strategies for using empathy as a catalyst for leading with more compassion.

Take a mental and emotional step away.

To avoid getting caught in an empathetic hijack when you are with someone who is suffering, try to take a mental and emotional step away. Step out of the emotional space to get a clearer perspective of the situation and the person. Only with this perspective will you be able to help. By creating this emotional distance, you may feel like you are being unkind. But remember you are not stepping away from the person. Instead, you are stepping away from the problem so you can help solve it.

Ask what they need.

When you ask the simple question “What do you need?” you have initiated a solution to the issue by giving the person an opportunity to reflect on what may be needed. This will better inform you about how you can help. And for the suffering person, the first step toward being helped is to feel heard and seen.

Remember the power of non-action.
Leaders are generally good at getting stuff done. But when it comes to people having challenges, it is important to remember that in many instances people do not need your solutions; they need your ear and your caring presence. Many problems just need to be heard and acknowledged. In this way, taking “non-action” can often be the most powerful means of helping.

**Coach the person so they can find their own solution.**

Leadership is not about solving problems for people. It is about growing and developing people, so they are empowered to solve their own problems. Avoid taking this life-learning opportunity away from people by straight-up solving their issues. Instead, coach them and mentor them. Show them a pathway to finding their own answers.

**Practice self-care.**

Show self-compassion by practicing authentic self-care. There is a cost to managing one’s own feelings to better manage others. Often called emotional labor, the task of absorbing, reflecting, and redirecting the feelings of other people can be overwhelming. Because of this, we as leaders must practice self-care: take breaks, sleep, and eat well, cultivate meaningful relationships, and practice mindfulness. We need to find ways of staying resilient, grounded, and in tune with ourselves. When we show up in the workplace with these qualities, people can lean on us and find solace and comfort in our well-being.

*This article is adapted from Compassionate Leadership: How to do Hard Things in a Human Way by Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter (Harvard Business Review Press 2022).*

---

**What Do You Think?**

I realize the information presented in this article might contradict the title and description for our workshop—and am curious to know what you think. Take a few minutes to jot down some responses to the following:

1. What insights or perspectives do you find helpful (or useful) in this article? What are points you might disagree with?

2. In what ways do you currently demonstrate empathy and compassion in your day-to-day work? In your community? With those you spend time with outside of work?

3. What might be possible for you if your skills around Empathy and Compassion were kicked up a notch?

4. What connections do you see between this article and the information on EQ form 6seconds.org?