

## Snapshot Management: Leaders under the Spotlight Use Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence has been found to be the critical success factor for leaders when compared with their Intelligence (IQ) and technical expertise. The further a leader goes up in an organization the more they need Emotional Intelligence. Emotionally Intelligent leaders know and manage themselves well and understand and manage others well. These “moments of truth” happen very quickly and stars consistently do what the average performer ignores, avoids or is unaware of.

This article explores the invisible territory of inferences and assumptions that employees quickly make of their leaders and leaders constantly make of their direct reports. Often incorrect or based on limited data, these assumptions of leaders are powerful influencers on employee’s motivation, creativity, mood and performance.

### **Leaders are under the Spotlight 24/7**

Communication is important to all of us, but leaders are under the spotlight by their direct reports and the organization all the time, 24/7. Like Santa Claus the organization sees when you are good and bad. Almost all leaders I have dealt with don’t realize this to the extent that it happens. Therefore most leaders have underestimated their influence on others and consequently have underperformed as have their teams. Most leaders are more concerned with getting their job and tasks done rather than how they are perceived by others.

Without realizing it, the snapshots of you are quickly collected to form an impression. It exemplifies what I call “Snapshot Management.” Members quickly make positive or negative fixed impressions of you as a leader. If your behavior, posture, and style are similar in three to four meeting snapshots and you can count it on “One Hand.” Then you get “thin-sliced” as “that is you.” People don’t take time to truly understand your intentions or rationale. They want to know quickly if they can trust you or not. If you are unpredictable, you are untrustworthy in their eyes. Certainty, even if wrong, is more comfortable than ambivalence. These snapshots may not be accurate portraits of who you are as a leader, but unfortunately they stick in people’s minds and become “reality.”

### **How are these snapshots formed?**

Below are some of the basic premises that make leadership such a challenging endeavor:

\*People don’t have time to truly get to know you; instead they take the easiest short cuts.

\*2 by 4 rule: The impression you make in the first 4 seconds is so powerful that it takes 4 more minutes to change it 50% either positively or negatively.

\*Many of these snapshots take place in meetings; it is often here that your image as a leader gets crystallized.

\*You are always communicating, even if you are not saying anything.

**\*Everything you say counts. There are no second attempts, editing, or deleting of what you say.**

\*When your words leave your mouth, you have no control over how they are going to be interpreted.

\*Listeners are constantly constructing or “story making.” That means they are always interpreting what you say.

\*Your words are transformed or reorganized to fit into the listener’s personal story or preconceived idea of you and/or similar situations.

\*There will be more than one story. Each listener will create his or her own.

\*The story that is created from your communication determines the meaning, not what you actually say.

\*It is the story, not what you say, that will be remembered, passed on, and communicated to others.

Given these premises, the **likely outcome of your communication is that you will be misunderstood, and therefore you need to be very clear, deliberate, and focused in your communication.** There are many strategies and tools to help you win the empathy and communication battle to reach your targets. These strategies deal with communication, delivery of your message, listening well, empathy, clarifying assumptions and other skills to use with your team or groups. Stars will do these strategies consistently or regularly.

### **Getting the Benefit of the Doubt**

If your snapshot image is positive, your colleagues and boss will give you the “benefit of the doubt” if you miss a deadline or make a mistake. The problem occurs when these snapshots are negative; because once the impression is made it is almost impossible to change. If this impression was created because you have been unpredictable or impulsive in your behavior, your direct reports, peers, and boss are constantly poised for that same behavior. They can’t trust that you can control yourself. Even if you make considerable changes over 6-12 months, if the same impulsive behavior happens again, in most people’s minds you haven’t changed at all. They think, “There he or she goes again.” I have been in meetings with executives talking about the performance of an individual victimized by “Snapshot Management.” The question discussed was, “If this person actually made positive changes, would the executives see and recognize them?” **Original snapshots are so powerful that they can blind people to the multifaceted sides of a person.** All of the person’s wins, strengths, and capabilities in different settings with different people can blur the original fixed snapshot, but it is a very slow process and doesn’t always stick. It is crucial to become acutely aware of how you present yourself in meetings and important to learn how to manage the snapshots you give people.

### **Collage versus Snapshot**

The goal is to counter the one hand of snapshots with a “collage” of all your successes and efforts. That may mean communicating more than you feel is necessary about what you have accomplished. Many executives say, “I don’t want to toot my own horn” or “They will see my results.” In taking the initiative to communicate in an informative and respectful way what you have been doing, you can ensure that your co-workers and boss “see” more of you than just a few snapshots. Otherwise, you are leaving your image management more in the hands and minds of others. Being more visible has been a strategy for many executives I have worked with, especially if they have negative snapshots ingrained in the minds of their supervisors or co-workers.

For example, here are some “micro-initiatives” you can say without boasting:

“I feel very comfortable with our progress thus far in...”

“The team is really performing well with...”

“I am very proud about...”

“I am excited with our direction with...”

### **Questions and Action Applications:**

To help counter Snapshot Management and raise your Emotional Intelligence you can take more responsibility for your image management and challenge the initial assumptions you have of others. Here are some questions and actions you can take.

\*What are the snapshots of you? Of the top five how many are positive or negative?

\*Are you taking the opportunities to present the “collage” of your successes and efforts?

\*What preparation do you need to take to ensure at meetings you are presenting your best snapshots and not being emotionally reactive?

\*Do you have snapshots of people that are limiting how you see them?

\*Can you spend more time inquiring about other successes they have had and multiply or expand your snapshots of them?

If three or more of your top five snapshots are negative, you will have to work hard to stay consistent and let others SEE your changes. Remember everything you say counts and you are under the spotlight 24/7.

### About the Author

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