How to Tune In

Emotional intelligence pioneer Daniel Goleman weighs in on how education leaders can use the techniques to improve schools.

Daniel Goleman is considered to be one of the pioneers of the emotional intelligence concept, which emanates from his work as a psychologist. His foundational work, the 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence*, has more than 5 million copies in print, and his latest book, *Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, is poised to be similarly impactful. This summer, as a keynote speaker at NAESP’s Best Practices for Better Schools Annual Conference, Goleman will tailor his research on emotional intelligence to education leaders. Here is a snapshot of his message.

What business leaders and education leaders can learn from one another.

I don’t see much difference between the school setting and any other organization, whether it’s business, a non-profit, or a church. Regardless, people look to the leader for guidance, for some sense of security. They look to the leader for clarity and for performance feedback.

Leading through landmark changes.

With change comes uncertainty, and uncertainty makes people feel insecure. So one of the important things you can do as a school leader during times of change is to create a sense of security—that you really care about people and that they are safe with you. This lets people work at their best to innovate, take risks, and not be afraid of changes.

What principals can do right away to become more emotionally intelligent.

So often we live in a reactive space where we are just responding to emails, phone messages, texts—one thing after another. We don’t take time for ourselves. The first task of leadership is leading yourself. That means taking time to reflect and determine your values, your concerns, and what matters to you.

The second thing is having emotionally intelligent interactions. Tune in to the person you are with and really listen. Find out their concerns and what is on their minds, and then speak to that.

On self-care and self-reflection.

You need to take care of yourself first because whatever strong emotions you feel radiate outwards, whether you know it or not. Negative emotions lower people’s ability to function. Listen to yourself, and manage your emotions. Find ways to soothe your upset, to calm yourself. This will put you in a better place to lead.
Principal preparation and professional development.
There is no genetic set point at birth that determines our skills at tuning in to ourselves, managing our feelings, or empathizing and interacting with others. These abilities are learned and learnable. All of these abilities and competencies build over time, so I’d like to see schools of education offer courses that help education leaders increase them. Business schools now do that routinely for their students, and those courses are very popular. I would love to see cultivating emotional intelligence as a part of every principal’s training.

What it takes to provide a well-rounded and complete education.
There is a saying in the business world: Banish fear. Findings in cognitive neuroscience show that fear and anxiety diminish our ability to pay attention and learn—whether we are students, teachers, or principals. Think about the best conditions for learning, and what leaders, teachers, and even students can do to achieve them.

I am a big advocate of social-emotional learning that adds to students’ standard academic curriculum. Managing upsetting emotions, tuning in to others, and developing social skills all work together for very good decision-making.

Keynote speaker Daniel Goleman will offer fresh thinking on emotional intelligence at NAESP’s Best Practices for Better Schools Conference, National Harbor, Maryland, July 6-8. Register today at naespconference.org.