

The outer game of leadership: earning respect and building a values-based culture

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In my previous blog ([Turnbull, 2026](#)), I explored the foundational work of building self-awareness, embracing authenticity, and managing the ego. This internal alignment is critical, but it's only half the battle. The true test of leadership lies in the outer game: how you translate that internal character into external impact. It's about how you interact with your team, how you make decisions under pressure, and the kind of environment you cultivate.

Effective leadership is not a performance for external validation; it is an expression of internal values. It's where your character meets the complexities of human dynamics and organisational challenges. This is where you move from knowing yourself to leading others.

This post will provide a framework for mastering this outer game by exploring the skillset of emotional intelligence (EI), tackling the critical difference between being a 'liked' leader and a respected one, and providing a practical model for building a resilient, high-performing organisational culture based on values.

Leading with emotional intelligence

Popularised by psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995), EI is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognise and influence the emotions of others ([Channell, 2021](#); [Ott, n.d.](#); [Landry, 2019](#)). Extensive research has shown that EI is a critical competency for effective leadership, often mattering more than IQ or technical skill ([Landry, 2019](#); [Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023](#)). Goleman's model is broken down into four core, learnable competencies ([Channell, 2021](#)):

1. **Self-awareness:** The foundational competency explored in [Turnbull \(2026\)](#). It is the ability to recognise your own emotions and their effect on others.
2. **Self-management:** The ability to control disruptive impulses and manage your emotions in healthy ways. This is the practical skill that allows you to pause between a stimulus and a response.
3. **Social awareness:** This is primarily about **empathy**—the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and 'read a room.' Empathetic leaders are consistently viewed as better performers.
4. **Relationship management:** The culmination of the other three competencies. This is the ability to build relationships, communicate clearly, inspire others, and manage conflict effectively.

A leader with high EI doesn't ignore a 'gut feeling'—they recognise it as valuable data, investigate its source, and integrate it with rational analysis to make a more holistic decision. This is the skillset

that allows a leader to be both compassionate and decisive.

The leadership imperative: earning respect over chasing popularity

One of the most common traps for leaders is the desire to be liked—a trap I found myself in as briefly explored in [Turnbull \(2026\)](#). By **prioritising popularity**, I was actively contributing to poor behaviour, with my ego signing this off as ‘fostering camaraderie.’ Those two Commanding Officers saw it for what it was, however: a significant blind spot that was undermining my authority and overall effectiveness. Chasing popularity, or ‘likership,’ often leads to conflict avoidance, indecisiveness, and a reluctance to hold people accountable—all of which erode a leader’s effectiveness ([Angana, 2023](#)). While this approach may create a pleasant atmosphere in the short term, it undermines authority and credibility.

Respect, on the other hand, is the true currency of leadership. It is earned through a consistent demonstration of competence, integrity, and character ([Angana, 2023](#); [Gill, 2013](#)). Respect is the bedrock of long-term trust and influence, forming a much more durable foundation than popularity. Leaders who prioritise respect inspire genuine loyalty and foster a culture of excellence. The most effective leaders are often both respected and liked; however, the causal relationship is critical: **they are liked because they are respected** ([Quaquebeke, 2014](#)).

Your action plan: the four principles of values-based leadership

So how do you put all of this into practice? The most effective way is to adopt a philosophy of **Values-Based Leadership (VBL)**. VBL argues that for leadership to be sustainable, it must be rooted in a strong moral foundation ([Copeland, 2014](#); [Žydžiūnaitė, 2018](#); [Lumpkin, 2023](#)). It is the framework that connects your internal character to your external actions.

Harry Kraemer (2011) developed a practical model of VBL based on four interconnected principles that serve as an excellent action plan:

1. **Self-reflection:** The ongoing practice of understanding your values and assessing if your actions align with them. As Kraemer (2011) asks, "If you are not self-reflective, how can you know yourself? If you do not know yourself, how can you lead yourself? If you cannot lead yourself, how can you lead others?"
2. **Balance:** The ability to see situations from multiple perspectives and understand all sides of an issue before making a decision.
3. **True self-confidence:** Not arrogance, but the humility to admit, ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I was wrong,’ because the focus is on doing what is right, not on being right.
4. **Genuine humility:** The understanding that the world does not revolve around you. It involves appreciating the unique value of every person and remaining grounded.

These four principles form a self-reinforcing system: self-reflection fosters humility; humility drives you to seek balance. This integrated practice is the source of true self-confidence, creating a cycle of continuous character development. The outcome of a values-based leader’s work is the creation of a **positive organisational culture**—the shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide behaviour ([Dextras-Gauthier et al, 2023](#); [Cote, 2023](#)). Fundamentally, followers learn what is valued by observing the behaviour of their leaders ([Lumpkin, 2023](#)). When a leader ‘walks the talk,’ their values become embedded in the culture.

Getting it right

As a senior Warrant Officer, the 'need' to be seen as wise, to sagely 'know stuff,' and be a fount of knowledge is something that, for me, still creates tension. This, of course, is my ego at play, however, my character is a lot stronger now than it was back in the days of me standing at attention in front of my CO's desk. Today, version 2.0 of my leadership draws on the VBL framework, whereby a cycle of values-based self-awareness continually balances my ego/character tension, with humility driving my actions and decisions. I am confidently able to put my hand up when I (often) don't know something, ensuring I'm open to listening and learning— this is true wisdom. This process is now a sub-conscious habit, noting that it has taken time and a lot of effort to form.

Conclusion: the leader worth following

Effective leadership is an inside-out process. It begins with self-awareness to know who you are and what you stand for. It is disciplined by the emotional intelligence and humility required to manage your ego and connect with others. It results in a leader who is guided by values, makes principled decisions, and earns the deep respect of their team. Underpinning this is resisting the temptation to merely be liked; that is a fleeting and hollow victory. Strive to be a leader worth following. The former is a matter of personality; the latter is a matter of character. And it is character that creates a legacy. As with my previous blog ([Turnbull, 2025](#)), if you've again made it here to the end, what are you doing with this knowledge? As a tip, take time this week to identify your top three values and one new habit to visibly model them.

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