

# Episode 339: Lead Smarter by Increasing Your Emotional Intelligence with Roberta Fernandez

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**Mamie Kanfer Stewart 00:00**

I don't know if I was ever directly told that you shouldn't show emotions at work, but that was definitely the general ethos of the American work culture. But the thing is that we are all experiencing emotions all day long, so instead of trying to pretend they don't exist, we need to learn to manage them effectively, and that's what today's guest is here to do. Today's guest is Roberta Fernandez. Roberta is a professional development consultant specializing in emotional intelligence and organizational culture change. She holds a Master Practitioner certification in NLP and is a board certified hypnotherapist, making her uniquely skilled in understanding human behavior. Roberta's past clients form a diverse portfolio, including Kemps, Sam's Club, Target, Optum, Pentair, governments, academic institutions and private small businesses. If you want to hear more from Roberta and all of my guests, become a member of Podcast+. In the extended episode, Roberta explains how to proactively prevent a conversation from getting emotional, and how to reduce the emotional intensity during important moments. Check out all the benefits of membership and join a community of rock star managers at [themodernmanager.com/more](https://themodernmanager.com/more). Now, here's my conversation with Roberta.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart 01:10**

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**Mamie Kanfer Stewart 01:36**

Thank you so much for joining me today, Roberta, I'm super excited to talk about emotional intelligence. I have covered this topic a few times on the show, but I keep coming back to it

because I feel like it's something that every manager needs to just always be working on. It's such an important skill set. So thank you for joining me today.

**Roberta Fernandez** 01:54

I am really excited to be here.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 01:56

What is emotional intelligence? I mean, I feel like it's a term that we all like, know, but like, what's your definition? Or how do you understand what emotional intelligence is?

**Roberta Fernandez** 02:06

Well, I think emotions drive all behavior. And so as a manager, you're dealing with a lot of people and working with employees in this sea of perspectives, because everybody has different thoughts and ideas about things, and they feel very strongly about those things. And so when you're emotionally intelligent, you understand your own feelings, you know how to manage them, and therefore it helps you have better relationships with the people that you're managing.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 02:34

Oh my gosh, if only we all could understand our feelings and manage them and maybe understand what other people are feeling too. Sometimes it feels like is that a part of it also? Is it really just the internal part of it for us?

**Roberta Fernandez** 02:48

No, I think it's all of it, actually. So let me give you an example of what that might look like. Let's say you're in a meeting with your team, and there's some conflict in that meeting, and one of the team members is expressing that conflict, and he's obviously very angry. When you're emotionally intelligent, you understand that anger means something very important. It's an emotion that is saying, I don't think something's fair, right? So that person is being angry is thinking, This isn't fair. So you could get angry back and go head to head with that person, or you could say, Hey, Joe, I can see that you don't think something's fair about this. How do we make this fair? Now that feels very different, right? Rather than just saying, hey, stop getting

ticked off about this, or, you know, keep your opinion to yourself, whatever, right? I mean, those are bad things, but they happen every day. Now, you have opened yourself up to that person in a way that you never have before, like you're saying, I see you, I get you. I understand what you're thinking and feeling. How do we fix this? And when you can be emotionally intelligent in that way, it changes the trajectory of everything, whether it's with an employee, a customer, doesn't matter.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 04:06

I can see how powerful that is, because it's so easy to get swept up into other people's emotions, right? And when they're heated, then we get heated, or when they're really excited, we get really excited and like, it just spirals for good or for bad. I mean, I think that's what's one of the challenging parts about it, is that sometimes it's fun to get caught up in the emotions, and sometimes it's not so helpful.

**Roberta Fernandez** 04:29

It will. And you know, today, we live in a divided world, and people are very set in their thinking. And in my training, I talk a lot about the power of observation, and there's five rules of observation, but the first couple of roles is really kind of stepping outside of yourself, in other words, keeping the emotion out of it, and saying, Okay, what am I doing in this situation? You know, how am I acting? Am I emotional? You know, what's my behavior look like? And then trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes. And the third role would be to look at that interchange itself, to look at the two people involved and kind of look at what's and sometimes people are capable of doing this in the moment, and sometimes it's something that applies to the later roles, which is after the fact and observing that observe, You, how well did you do and evaluating in an honest way, right, an unbiased way, which is really hard to do when we're looking at our own behaviors, but understanding those five roles of observation and not being emotionally attached to the outcome, that's the key with pretty much everything is that we get so wrapped up in what we want to accomplish and what we think that outcome should be that it actually stands in the way of us getting what we want.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 05:59

In order to get what we want, or to increase the chances we're going to get what we want, we actually need to be a little more detached and less less emotional. Tell me.

**Roberta Fernandez** 06:09

Yeah. So it's important. It's and this is the interesting thing people say, Oh, well, you want me to be cold and hard and objective? No, not at all. The first step in all of this is understanding emotions. Because all emotions are good. They're trying to tell you something. It's like your internal GPS system. So when you're angry, you're thinking something's not fair. When you're sad, there's been loss, somebody or something that was invaluable to you is no longer right. When you're bored, you need a challenge. So all of these emotions that we think are negative because we've been taught that are not negative at all. They're trying to tell us that we're not getting something we need or desire. So when we can understand what they mean, understand how they influence us and how to manage them more appropriately, in other words, how to get what we need right, then we can recognize those things in other people, because there is a sea of perspectives out there. Our thoughts create our reality, our experiences, our thoughts, our emotions, they all get bundled up into this package that reflects how we see the world. So I'll give you an example.

**Roberta Fernandez** 07:28

I love to tell the story. When my daughter was six, my husband and I were prolific whitewater rafters. We love to the bigger the rapid, the better, right? So we're taking our daughter on her first rapid trip. And it was it, you know, it wasn't a big deal. It was a float trip with a couple of little ones, or May, I think there was a two in it. And I was nervous. She was six. The river was super cold, and when we got to the rafting area, it was not the kind of raft I was hoping it would be, because it was hard for her to hold on. And, you know, my husband was like, Oh yeah, it's gonna be so great. Let's go, go, go, right, you know? So she's getting these mixed messages. So fast forward, you have a great time. A couple months later, we're with family, and we are talking about this raft trip. Now the reality is that we went white water rafting. That was the reality, but our map of that reality looked very different, and you would have thought from how we all shared our story about that trip, we were on three different rivers, having totally different experiences, because our perspective shaped the way we perceive that event. And so that happens every single day, with every single thing that we encounter, and every person that we're working with, that we're managing is coming from a different perspective. It all starts with thoughts and emotions. And what I know to be true is that those things have to be congruent. They have to match. Because a lot of times when I've worked with people individually on change and the challenges they have. There's a disconnect between what they want consciously and what their subconscious mind believes is possible. They might have imposter syndrome. They might have limiting beliefs. They might have just misperceptions about things. And that disconnect causes problems in a lot of way. It could be emotional issues, it could be physical issues, could be a whole wealth of things, but that disconnect needs to be resolved. So the more you understand about emotions and how your mind works, how your mind governs everything, and how we how we do perceive things, the better we're going to be in interacting with other people and having a more productive workplace, more employee engagement, you name it.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 09:56

Oh my gosh. You just said so many things. I want to, I want to try and pull out a bunch of threads here. So first is that our emotions are, are a signal or a compass, or they're, they're, they're trying to guide us because there's something that's missing or something that feels not right for us and like that is just like, just right there being like, Oh yeah, when I feel an emotion like, the first thing I can do is just say, like, what's missing for me, right? Like, what am I not getting that I need, or what is the desire I want that's not being fulfilled? It feels like even just taking that step suddenly can give you some space or some some perspective on the situation. So that's just like, Yes, I need to start doing that.

**Roberta Fernandez** 10:36

It's amazing. And here's the interesting thing about those emotions, they're typically formed when we're very young, and a lot of times they're misperceptions, because when we're young, we don't have the concept of the big world, right? We see that from a four year old's perspective, which is pretty limited. And so what happens is we start, we start creating belief systems based on misperception. So it's like the proverbial garbage in, garbage out, and we carry these belief systems we don't even really realize we have throughout our whole life. And you know, some of them never bother us, and some of them really end up affecting us down the road when they start getting triggered. So understanding how your mind works and how emotions are involved in that, and how we make decisions. A long time ago, I learned something called fair, F, A, R, E, it's an acronym, and it stands for focus, associate, repeat and expect. And there are four laws of the mind. What we focus on, we get more of and it expands. We then start associating all kinds of things with that focus, images, pictures, thoughts, smells, they become triggers for those emotions. Right when we do that repeatedly and repeatedly and we invest passion in it, it becomes who we are. It's a deeply seated belief. And then the E is expectation. We get exactly what we expect we will. So if you're not getting what you want, whether it's problem you know, problem solving, or whatever, you've got to look at where your focus is, what you're associating with it and and what your belief system is around it. Because you're gonna get exactly what you think you will and when you can intervene in any of those places and make change, everything has to change. You know? Everything's a system, so we make a small change. Everything has to change with it, and sometimes they might have unexpected consequences, right? So it's really important that we look at that system and how we're making change.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 12:48

Could you maybe give us an example or tell us a story that kind of describes what you're talking about, around focus and the expectations?

**Roberta Fernandez** 12:56

It was a company that called me years ago, when I was in Minnesota. On paper, they looked like like a match made in heaven. The expectations for this company. This merger was really high. One was a tech company, and I can't tell you who they are. They didn't make it, but they had some really innovative, cool products. But they were geeks, they were engineers and, you know, tech specialists, right? They merged with a sales company, which they really needed. They needed each other, right? Sales people were excited. They was cool stuff that was happening here, but that merger, that acquisition, was handled really badly, and they were two, two and a half years into the merger, and they called me, and I'm asking them a lot of questions, and I said, so what was the impetus? You know what? What triggered this phone call? And they said, Well, we had our yearly annual picnic, and none of the engineers showed up. And I said to them, I said, you know, you should have called me two and a half years ago, because they were s in essence, functioning still separately as separate companies, and they didn't take a look at how they were going to merge these two very different personalities, and neither one of them was open to change, and they kind of just functioned side by side, rather than merging. And so it's a really good example of emotions again, you know, understanding expectations, each one of them had a different focus. They were very strongly rooted in their belief system about how things should been done, and the people at the top didn't have any understanding of how that was going to work, and it was handled really poorly. And so, you know, you contrast that to another company, a very large company that I worked with. I worked with them for two years. We trained everybody from their C suite down to their lower level management company on organizational change, and a lot of it was around emotions. They were a very successful dairy company. Started out really small, and were acquired along the way, but they were getting ready to be acquired by a major Co Op, a huge Co Op, and it was going to change everything. They hired me, you know, proactively, because they knew it was going to be a lot of change for their people. And I came in and over two years, we trained everybody they went on to be very successful. So, you know, there always two very different ways to handle things within an organization, whether you're looking at a merger or change, whether you're looking at just how you deal with your team and the people that are working for you, when you start under at the basics and you understand that we're working with human beings, right? We're all human beings. They're just not a social security number that's getting a paycheck, right? And the value in that is that when you approach situations that way, you open yourself to this world of possibilities that are unknown to us because we don't see them. We just come in with our perspective, our way. So I have a tool that I've adapted. It's called the Ahara Shift. It clearly illustrates how we're really only open to about 25% of the possibilities that are out there. Where are those other possibilities? Some things we're blind to. Some things are hidden from us. Some things are just unknown. But that leaves 75% of the field of possibilities out there that we're not open to, and it all starts with learning how to live in that sea of perspectives which are made up by emotions.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 16:45

I want to get really practical for a minute, because you talked about training people around emotional intelligence, change, navigating all of that. What's one of your like, top tips for navigating the emotions that come when you're going through a change in the workplace?

**Roberta Fernandez** 17:03

I think you have to have a basic education on emotion right? And emotions, there's, we have 1000s of names for them. And you know, emotions, scientifically, are chemicals. It's a chemical. Each emotion that we experience is a specific a chemical signature in our bodies, right? So, you know, I don't go into that with my clients, but it's important for me to understand the science behind all this, right? And how our bodies literally have to have those things satisfied, or it keeps craving the solution for it, right? So these emotions that are left unsatisfied can become very problematic if they're not resolved, because it's trying to tell you something, and your subconscious mind is amazing and very persistent at getting things resolved, and it's going to get your attention in sometimes unwanted ways. So it really is about having basic education. And I like to distill this, these 1000s of names we have for the subtleties of emotions, down into the basics, right? So you understand the basic 10 emotions. Let's say that most people experience once you understand what they're trying to tell you, it's so much easier to recognize them. And that is how we start becoming intelligent again, starting with ourselves. I've always have to start, you know, at home first. And I think the other thing is understanding them. But then, how do you manage them? Because that's a whole nother world. It's one thing to recognize. It's another thing to say, Okay, how do I deal with that? Right? And it also it that too, has to start with yourself. First. Daniel Goldman was, you know, right on when he developed this idea of emotional intelligence. Because when we do that, and we can recognize it in other people, we become much better problem solvers. We become much more open thinkers, and that's another problem that we are. We've been using the same way of thinking for hundreds of years, and it's not working anymore. You know, Einstein said we can't solve today's problems with the same kind of thinking that got us there. When we are emotionally intelligent, we automatically become different kinds of thinkers. And when we can think differently, we problem solve differently.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 19:21

You're right, like it starts with recognizing it and understanding, but then, I mean, I see this with people all the time, right? Like you're in a meeting and gets heated or and clear someone's frustrated, and even when you get to like, the next agenda topic, like, it's still there, right? It's not just like, Oh, we're done, motions, goodbye, done Yes, like, and so being able to manage those emotions, and being able to like, stay calm when someone is really riling you up, right? To be able to like, not get defensive when you're getting feedback, like that's so hard. So what are some of the things that we can do to to help manage those emotions when we are aware enough that we're experiencing them?



Well, I think the first thing, and it sounds really simple, but it is the most effective thing, I think, that I can teach people, is take a breath when I say that, I mean a deep belly breath, because, again, this is based in science, stimulates the vagus nerve when we breathe deeply, like that with our bellies, and where the vagus nerve runs under the diaphragm, it has one job, and that's to send a message to the brain to release calming chemicals, things like endorphins, melatonin. And serotonin, oxytocin, things that organically calm us down. When we can get ourselves calm, we think clearer, we can be more objective, we can emotionally unattach from that situation, then we can not be connected so strongly to the outcome, because something is now in the way of that outcome, right? So we think clearly and we can be more focused. So practicing this five deep belly breaths, it just is how our brain works. So that's step number one. Step number two is listening, and I don't mean that old technique, that people like old technique, but they're still taught it today, that I'm going to listen to what you say. I'm going to spit it back to you. You know, well what I hear you're saying is it just feels so unauthentic, but really what I call being one in conversation, and that is not just with your mind, but with your body and relating to somebody on an emotional level. So let me take it back to my early when we talked about anger. Okay? Anger is it's not fair. That's typically the most common emotion you're going to see in everybody, right? Because if you're an employee, you know, working under a manager, you're being told what to do and how to do it all the time, no different than like a little kid, right? Little kids are always expressing anger because everything's unfair. They don't have any autonomy. They're being told what to do every moment of the day. It's kind of like that at work sometime in a lot of work environments, right? And you know, this is what causes people to disengage. It's what causes turnover. It's what causes the inability to attract good talent, because you get a reputation, right? So it when I can come to you and I can say, I can take a deep breath, I can see the anger. I can hear the anger in your voice. I know what anger means. It means something's not fair. Your perception. It may not be my perception. I may think it's fine, but But you I have to value what you feel, and my goal is to be objective and to get to the root of where that emotion is coming from. So when I say to you, you know, I can see that you don't think this is fair. Tell me your opinion of that and how we can make it fair. Now, I'm not relating to you on the same level that I was before. It's good to catch that person off guard, and it's gonna there's gonna be this little aha moment of Wow. He he sees this, he understands me. And again, that changes everything. So it really starts at that, that basic human level, and how we just relate as human beings, as people, to people. Now it doesn't mean, just because you can do that, are you going to get the outcome that you want, sometimes yes, sometimes no. But the cool thing about it is you've learned something really valuable from that interaction. You've given that individual the opportunity to express themselves in a different way, to share their opinion. And a good manager, a good leader, is going to learn from that they may not agree with it. It may not even be appropriate for the situation, but you've created a a relationship now with that employee, you've created this, this bond, and they're going to go back and tell their co workers, you know, I didn't get what I want, but he really listened to me. You get it, you see what I'm saying. So it can have many, many positive impacts. And you may get a perspective that totally changes yours, right? You may see, you may hear from that person a perspective that you'd



never thought of before, and it may have merit, right? And that may change the trajectory in a different way, and hopefully a better way. And so it's an opportunity for both parties to learn, and when you learn, there's growth.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 24:34

I love this so much because I feel like I even with my own clients, like I tell them, we make up stories about other people all the time, right? And so we are assuming that someone is upset about something for the reason that seems obvious to us, and sometimes it is not at all the reason that they are upset, right? And so by actually just sitting down and saying, like, you seem really upset about this, right? Like, tell me more about what is, what in particular is irk at you, right, just opening up that conversation you're right, it totally changes the dynamic they feel so seen and valued. You learn something, because most of the time, the stories we're telling ourselves about what they're experiencing, what they're thinking, what they're feeling, aren't true, like we were filling in gaps just so that we but it doesn't actually help us.

**Roberta Fernandez** 25:19

So it's really funny that you bring this up. Do you want to have a little game? Because this is so fun. Okay, so there's this little thing that I do, and it's all about the stories you tell. This is an A horror principle that I talk about. So I want you to think of an object, any object. Just come up with something. What is that object?

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 25:38

An apple.

**Roberta Fernandez** 25:39

Okay, now I want you to think of another unrelated object.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 25:43

A dog.

**Roberta Fernandez** 25:44

So how is Apple like the dog?

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 25:49

They are both from nature.

**Roberta Fernandez** 25:51

Okay, okay. How is the Apple better than the dog?

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 25:56

At least in America, you can eat it, okay, an apple, but not a dog.

**Roberta Fernandez** 26:01

How is the Apple the parent of the dog?

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 26:05

I don't know. I can you some help with that? How is the apple, the parent of the dog?

**Roberta Fernandez** 26:09

Just whatever comes to your mind,

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 26:11

It gets to sit on my counter, and the dog does not.

**Roberta Fernandez 26:14**

There you go. So here's, here's the the moral of this little game, right? Just like a fish swims in water, you swim in your thoughts, and you're always going to find an answer to those three questions, your mind is going to create something that may or may not be true. And I don't care how many times I have played this game with people, they always come up with something. And so you act on what you believe. And the interesting thing that I say to people is okay, so how do you know what you know? And you get all kinds of answers. Many people think, well, it's based on numbers or scientific fact, or it's part of my family culture, like this is just the way it always was, or I read it in a book, or I saw it on TV, or somebody that I really respect told me right? Or I just feel it in my gut. These are all reasons that we have for knowing what we know. And so what I like to do with people is to challenge them and say, what's the basis for your acceptance of these stories that you continue to tell, and it is a very interesting thing that starts happening with people when you challenge their belief systems and say, How do you know what you know? And playing that little game about with the two objects is a real illustration of how we make stuff up all the time. We take a little bit of fact and we build a whole story around it.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart 27:58**

And then we become so attached to it.

**Roberta Fernandez 28:00**

And we do and we'll defend it to the end, right where there's really nothing there. And here's the interesting thing that I see today that's just such a huge barrier to all of this, is that so many people feel the need to be right. They have to be right. I've even had people say to me, Well, if I change my opinion, then it means I was wrong and I don't like to be wrong. I'm telling you that happens more often than what you think, because people don't want to be wrong. They have this need to be right, because when they're right, they feel safe, and our brain's primary job is to keep us safe. So we're always looking for danger. We're always looking for problems. It's very easy to focus on the negative, and when we're right, we feel very safe and secure with ourselves. So this is a basic human emotion, because fear is what that emotion is. Fear is trying to tell you that you don't feel safe or secure. So when you are manager, there's gonna be two things, two primary emotions that you're dealing with all the time. One is anger, it's not fair, and the other is fear. I don't feel safe or secure. And when you understand that, and you understand that emotion drives all behavior, then you really understand people, and you can problem solve, and you can work through issues. You can develop relationships. You can do all the things as a leader that you are supposed to be doing when you understand those emotions, because that is what's motivating, that person sitting in front of you, and when you learn what their motivations are, when you learn what their needs are, that they don't feel safe, well, if I say something contrary, you might I might not get that promotion, or I might lose my job, or you won't assign me

to that project that I really want to be on. Right when you understand that now you can be a better leader, and you get more from your employees. They're more productive, they're more excited, they're more engaged. People that have lots of talent want to work for you. It is emotion that is at the base of everything.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 30:19

Wow. I think this is the perfect place for us to wrap up. So Roberta, can you tell us about a great manager that you worked for and what made this part such a fabulous boss?

**Roberta Fernandez** 30:27

Well, I've been an independent contractor for pretty much my whole life, 40 some years. I'm giving away my age here, but I worked for a guy out of Sweden and in and Alan was the first in sustainability. And we had large clients. We had the country of Egypt. We had Levi Strauss. We have Toyota, and it was in the field of sustainability, starting out in environmental sustainability, but really it was the whole business sustainability. And Alan was so creative, and he understood people. And it was through Alan that I learned what emotional intelligence was and how to deal with those and use tools in a very creative and motivating way. So I would say he's definitely the most important mentor in my life.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 31:16

Beautiful. And where can people learn more about you and keep up with your work?

**Roberta Fernandez** 31:19

They can reach me at [RobertaFernandez.com](https://RobertaFernandez.com) for easy or Roberta@RobertaFernandez.com.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart** 31:25

Thank you again, so much for coming on and chatting with me today. It's such a pleasure.

**Roberta Fernandez** 31:29

It was great. Mamie, thanks for having me.

**Mamie Kanfer Stewart 31:31**

Roberta is providing members of Podcast+ with access to her emotional intelligence assessment as well as the frame tool, which she explains in the extended episode. To get this guest bonus and the extended episode, and so much more, become a member at [themodernmanager.com/more](https://themodernmanager.com/more). All the links are in the show notes, and they can be delivered to your inbox when you subscribe to my newsletter. Find that at [themodernmanager.com](https://themodernmanager.com). Thanks again for listening. Until next time.