



HUMAN FIRST, LEADER SECOND:

A MALE PERSPECTIVE ON EMOTION DURING CHANGE



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Summary:

Moderator [CJ Gross](#) and panelists [Riaz Meghji](#) and [Gary Deppe](#) for a candid conversation about how men experience, express, and sometimes suppress emotion at work and in life. Through personal stories about leadership, relationships, parenting, and change, the panel explored how expectations around masculinity and stoicism can make it difficult for men to acknowledge what they're feeling, let alone talk about it. **The conversation challenged the idea that strong leadership requires emotional certainty, instead showing how self-awareness, curiosity, and thoughtful vulnerability can build greater trust and connection.**

Key Takeaways

- **Name it privately before you share it publicly.** Gary and Riaz emphasized that emotional awareness doesn't mean *everyone* needs to immediately have a vulnerable conversation. A powerful first step is simply being able to recognize and name what you're experiencing yourself. Journaling, assessments, coaching, therapy, and tools like an emotions wheel were all discussed as ways to build that self-awareness.
- **Make emotional conversations an invitation, not an obligation.** Riaz encouraged leaders to notice when someone's energy or behavior seems different, ask with genuine curiosity, and leave the door open if that person isn't ready to talk.
- **Leaders don't need certainty to demonstrate confidence.** One of Gary's strongest points was the distinction between the two: a leader can acknowledge "I don't have all the answers" or "I'm anxious about how we're going to get there" while still expressing confidence that the team can navigate the path together. The group described this as "confident vulnerability."
- **Don't rush to fix what someone needs to feel.** A recurring theme was our instinct to jump into problem-solving mode. Sometimes leadership and support look more like staying with someone in the discomfort, listening, and asking what they need rather than immediately trying to make the difficult emotion disappear.
- **Seek out "productively uncomfortable" spaces.** Growth doesn't necessarily happen where we're already comfortable. Riaz shared how deliberately putting himself in environments that challenged him and reflected his blind spots back to him helped him navigate major personal change.