

HOW this HAPPENED

# HOW *this* HAPPENED

An analysis of how Barack Obama used his  
Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership  
skills to win His “Campaign Project”

DEREJE BEFEKADU TESSEMA

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Emotional Quotient Inventory: A Measure of Emotional Intelligence. Technical Manual by Reuven Bar-On, Ph.D., Multi-Health Systems (MHS). Material from this publication has been reproduced with permission of MHS.

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# TO MY PARENTS

Mrs. Shebelle Demeke and Mr. Befekadu Tessema  
for their unconditional love and support.

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# FOREWORD

## Grow The Hope: Let's make the Obama campaign the start of a transformational movement

Something special happened during the Obama campaign. Just how special will, in part, be determined by what you do after you read this book. On the day after the election, November 5, 2008, after leading an intense volunteer effort for many months, I urged those who had worked tirelessly on the campaign to take time to celebrate the fact that our hard work helped elect a smart and moral man to be our president. Still, if we stop there, we will fail to fulfill the enormous potential of the people's movement that came alive during this election.

I was thrilled to learn that the local Obama office, where I was honored to serve as Director, was part of the inspiration for this impressive book. Our committed team of leaders created a fun and productive office that welcomed thousands of volunteers and helped them feel part of the vital effort that enabled Democrats to win a Presidential Election in Virginia for the first time since 1964. Dereje Tessema presents his thoughtful analysis that "the campaign was a success primarily because it was approached as a project that Obama successfully executed, using emotional intelligence and transformational leadership skills." It was indeed that, and as the author tells us, it was so much more; the Obama campaign has the potential to awaken a powerful and durable citizen's movement. Dereje kindly asked me to add my voice to this book. Emotional intelligence allowed President Obama to connect with a vast peaceful army of volunteers ready to work hard to bring about real change. His transformational leadership skills allowed us to feel that our efforts were part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Throughout the campaign, volunteers encountered concerned citizens who either had never been active in politics before or who hadn't been for years or even decades. People came forward and got involved in deep and

was a success primarily because it was approached as a project that Obama successfully executed, using emotional intelligence and transformational leadership skills. This book presents my analysis and describes, in clear terms, how Obama and his campaign managers carried out this project.

During the course of the two years of this campaign, news stories abounded about the candidates, including views from different political analysts, stories from people who know the candidates personally, and detailed accounts of campaign-related events. None of the examples I refer to in this book will be new to the reader. Most of the information was aired on TV or radio shows in different formats, while others were disseminated in news articles or interviews. What then, is the reason for reproducing these stories? I think they will be more meaningful when seen as complementary parts of a whole, falling within the three frameworks of emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and project management. This campaign serves as a good example for understanding how these frameworks function and can be applied. Therefore I refer to the events, not in chronological order, but as needed to explain how the three frameworks operate.

According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), a project is defined as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.<sup>1</sup> The campaign for the presidency fits this definition in that it was a temporary endeavor. It was undertaken to create a unique result (having the candidate elected as President) and it had a beginning and an end. The campaign was also subject to the triple constraints of a project – time, cost and quality, with a limited amount of resources available – making it the perfect project to analyze.

Why am I Writing this Book?

There are three main reasons why I have chosen to write this book.

### ***My personal history as a first-generation immigrant***

Obama's life story relates to my story and the stories behind many Americans. As a first-generation immigrant to the US, I share his father's vision that it is

PART ONE

EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE  
AND  
TRANSFORMATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER ONE

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
AND ITS ROLE IN POLITICS



*“Don’t let it get to your head; just keep  
on working hard.”*

—Barack Obama, on what his mother would have said

**A**fter Obama had won the Democratic Party nomination, Wolf Blitzer, the CNN Situation Room and Late Edition anchor, interviewed him asking what his mother would say to him if she were here. Obama paused and answered, “She’d say, ‘Don’t let it get to your head. Just keep on working hard.’”

Our emotions should not get the better of us or control us when dealing with important issues like running for the highest office of the land. Obama’s response, even at a time when emotions were expected to run high, is indicative of his deep-rooted management of his emotions. During the entire campaign, regardless of whether it hit bottom or rode high, Obama has stayed calm, self-contained and relaxed. This, I believe, played a significant role in his winning the American voter’s confidence. On various occasions

throughout the campaign, he showed how he is able to control and apply his emotions appropriately.

The fierce primary campaign, his speech about race, various debates, his acceptance speech at the Democratic party convention, his reaction to the financial meltdown, the victory speech at Grant Park and his inaugural speech, have all been examples of his emotional mastery.

In the last few decades, we have witnessed how the emotional reactions of several politicians have hurt or helped their careers. Governor Howard Dean's emotional concession speech at the Iowa caucus in 2004 is widely believed to have cost him his candidacy. Senator Clinton's emotional outburst at the New Hampshire primary is said to have contributed to her win there. Both Senator McCain's and Obama's reactions to the financial meltdown have also been the subject of discussions regarding how the way they reacted, helped or worked against them.

The question here is, "How does one manage one's emotions so as to be effective?" To answer this, I have tried to understand how various schools of thought teach the definition, origin and explanation of emotions. I have visited the works of Robert Plutchik<sup>2</sup>, Daniel Goleman<sup>3</sup>, Peter Salovey and John Mayer<sup>4</sup>, and Reuven Bar-On<sup>5</sup> from Psychology, Daniel Amen<sup>6</sup> from neuropsychiatry, Eckart Tolle<sup>7</sup>, Noelle Nelson and Jeannine Calaba<sup>8</sup>, Larry Rosenberg<sup>9</sup> and Sharon Salzberg<sup>10</sup> from self-help and spiritual teaching.

## Emotion

*"Feeling will get you closer to the truth of who you are than thinking."*

—Eckhart Tolle (1999)

Since the beginning of human civilization, emotion has played a major role in politics, and its definition and origins have been debated since the time of Plato and Aristotle. Today those engaged in various research disciplines, including psychologists, neuroscientists, philosophers, computer scientists, economists, anthropologists and sociologists, are engaged in understanding this powerful concept. The Oxford English Dictionary defines emotion as

consider multiple points of view, and harness different emotions to encourage different approaches to problem solving.

*Understanding Emotions or Predicting the Emotional Future:* To understand complex emotions and emotional "chains," how emotions transition from one stage to another, recognize the cause of emotions and understand relationships among emotions.

*Managing Emotions:* To be open to emotions because they contain information and can influence thinking, incorporating emotions intelligently into reasoning, problem solving and judging. In addition, to be aware of where emotions are welcome or not, and to choose strategies that include the wisdom of feelings.

The different theorists agree that emotional intelligence is concerned with understanding oneself and others, relating to people, as well as adapting to and coping with, the immediate surroundings, in order to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands. However, it does not mean agreeing with everything that everyone says, trying to please everyone, or doing as one pleases. Emotional intelligence is not necessarily genetically given, but rather, something that can be developed throughout a person's lifetime.

## How can Emotional Intelligence be measured?

Unlike the Intelligence Quotient (IQ), which attempts to measure intelligence using one of several different standardized tests, the EQ measures key social aspects that individuals demonstrate to be successful in life. These concepts include:

- (a) the ability to be aware of, understand and express oneself,
  - (b) the ability to be aware of, understand and relate to others,
  - (c) the ability to deal with strong emotions and control one's impulses,
- and
- (d) the ability to adapt to change and solve problems of a personal or a social nature.

Various models use different scales to measure emotional intelligence. The one that is closer to the traditional IQ is Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), which measures EQ using the same scoring principle as IQ tests, where the average score is 100 and the standard scores range from 70 to 130+. The interpretive guideline for each score according to Bar-On is presented below.

Standard Score	Interpretive Guideline
130+	Markedly High – Atypically well-developed emotional capacity
120 - 129	Very High – Extremely well-developed emotional capacity
110 - 119	High – Well-developed emotional capacity
90 - 109	Average – Adequate emotional capacity
80 - 89	Low – Under-developed emotional capacity, requiring improvement
70 - 79	Very Low – Extremely under-developed emotional capacity, requiring improvement
Under 70	Markedly Low – Atypically impaired emotional capacity, requiring improvement

### Interpretive Guideline for Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ-i) (adapted from Bar-On [2004])

The Bar-On EQ model has five major composite factors and 15 subscales:

(a) the *intrapersonal* composite includes emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization and independence,

(b) the *interpersonal* composite includes empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility,

(c) the *adaptability* composite includes problem solving, reality testing and flexibility,

(d) the *stress management* composite includes stress tolerance and impulse control, and

(e) general *mood* includes happiness and optimism.

I will use some of these categories as reference points to analyze how Obama's reactions to certain events correspond to them. Below is a detailed analysis and synthesis of the selected EQ subscale with corresponding examples from the campaign trail and various other resources.