



Geared for Success

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Why Empathy Matters in Leadership

Empathy is one of the most researched and studied competencies of the Emotional Intelligence instrument (EQ 2.0). It is a powerful skill that impacts relationships by building deep levels of rapport and trust. Empathy has been consistently identified as a powerful predictor of success in leadership. In study after study, leaders who show empathy are positively viewed by their subordinates, bosses and others in the organization as team builders, collaborators, developers of people and motivators.

By definition, "empathy is the ability to be aware of, to understand and to appreciate the feelings and thoughts of others. It is tuning in to what, how and why people feel and think the way they do" (The EQ Edge - Emotional Intelligence and Your Success, by Steven Stein and Howard Book) Empathy does not mean you have to agree with how the person is seeing things - but rather that you are willing and able to appreciate what the person is verbalizing or showing in non-verbal ways. Having poor empathy skills can lead to serious consequences such as conflicts, misinterpreted actions/words, broken relationships and long term distrust.

Empathy requires an openness, honesty and vulnerability toward others. It requires leaders to be self-confident, willing to listen and take another person's perspective. Empathetic leaders are highly engaged with the members of their team-knowing what makes each member tick. To build your empathy competency consider the following actions:

- **Be fully present in the interaction.** Your greatest gift is your total and complete attention. Set aside your technical devices. Stop the chatter in your head. Demonstrate clear signs that you are physically present-providing eye contact, facing the person and ready to listen.
- **Listen.** Listen for two things: what the person is feeling and what they need. Give them a chance to express them. Note key words or phrases the person is using.



- **Listen with ears** - What is being said, and what tone is being used?
- **Listen with eyes** - What is the person doing with his/her body while speaking?
- **Listen with your instincts** - Do you sense that the person is not communicating something important?
- **Listen with your heart** - What do you think the other person feels?
- **Listen without judgments** -

Stop interjecting your own experiences in the situation.

- **Practice the 93% rule.** Only 7% of the total message people receive comes from words. The other 93% is contained in our tone and body language. Are you aware of how you come across to others?
- **Examine your attitude.** Is your focus on getting your way, winning or being right? Without an open mind there is little room for empathy.
- **Respond in encouraging ways** to the central message. Acknowledge the speaker's thoughts in physical (e.g. nodding, open gestures) and verbal ways ("yes", "okay", etc.).
- **Reflect back what you are hearing,** including feelings that

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"Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives."

Oprah Winfrey



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were expressed (e.g. "So you are disappointed and sad that you were not called back for a second interview?") Ensure you are hearing the message as intended.

Remember -- Demonstrating empathy does not mean: judging, deciding, pointing out flaws in the other person's actions (e.g. "I told you so"), assigning blame and immediately jumping in to problem solve. Practice using the right words and phrases like- "I am sorry you are feeling ___ about _____"; "I can't imagine what that is like for you.", "What would help you in this situation?" "This must be so ____ (difficult, uncomfortable, upsetting, etc.) to you."

Leaders are pulled in many directions. Using the skills for empathy are hard, take effort and may be time consuming. However, being an empathic leader has tangible benefits within the organization. The leader's actions help to create a culture of support, encouragement and respect. Empathy enables leaders to go beyond basic relationships and bond with the whole person. It makes a profound difference in cultivating a culture of compassion and concern.

Resource: "The Importance of Empathy in Leadership",
by Tanveer Naseer
& " 5 Ways to Be More Empathetic",
by Roman Krznaric

**"Empathy is walking a mile in somebody else's moccasins.
Sympathy is being sorry their feet hurt."**

Rebecca O'Donnell

Being an Effective Translator

One of the most important roles of a leader is the ability to translate messages from higher levels in the organization. This involves knowing how to accurately relay what needs to be heard and understood at the individual and team level. Just as it helps to know the language of a country you are visiting, your responsibility is to accurately translate essential information in ways that it will be understood by your team.

Delivering the message involves two key components: translating and buffering. In The Courageous Follower - Standing Up to & For Our Leaders, the author Ira Chaleff, refers to these roles as "functioning as a step-down transformer, taking on high voltage emanation from the leader and modulating it so it can be received usefully at its intended receipt point several levels down an organization." Smart leaders connect the dots, fill in the gaps and provide context to individuals and teams. It involves the leader taking a facilitative, intermediary stance-neutral, yet engaged.

Leaders are representative of the vision, mission and message coming from the highest levels of an organization. Delivering organizational messages, especially difficult ones, should be done with thought filled intention. Below are some guidelines

for ensuring that your messages will be received in the intended way:

- Before you speak, think carefully about how the message will be received-use empathy. How will others interpret what is being said?
- Don't dilute the message but think about how the message should be delivered in the context of your team.
- Watch your body language.
- Think carefully about the big picture and how you can build the message into what is needed for the organization. Explain the impact at the team and individual level.
- Instead of detailing how much you may disagree with the direction, find a collaborative path and build on possible benefits.

Once you have delivered and translated the message, serve to guide the action steps needed to make the message happen effectively. Continue to translate and buffer. Recognize ways to eliminate distractions and move your team forward.

"I have seen competent leaders who stood in front of a platoon and all they saw was a platoon. But great leaders stand in front of a platoon and see it as 44 individuals, each of who has aspirations, each of whom wants to live, each of whom wants to do good."

General Norman Schwarzkopf

Tips for Working with a Conflict Avoider

As you know, conflicts are part of the ever changing workplace. Even under the best circumstances, resolving disputes between co-workers is challenging. However, when you are working with a conflict avoider, getting a resolution takes extra effort and specific strategies.

First of all, why do people avoid conflict? There are a variety of reasons: social upbringing, lack of confidence, time on the job, inability to talk about and acknowledge negative feelings, core values of not wanting to "rock the boat", not being engaged at work-to name just a few. The conflict avoider may have been in past conflicts that were painful and then, distort all others-assuming every conflict will have this same pattern. As a result, conflict avoiders can be a determinant to themselves, individual relationships and the organization.

Research has shown that not one single strategy will help in working with the conflict avoider. Here are some of the suggested ways from [Resolving Conflict at Work-Eight Strategies for Everyone on the Job](#), by Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith and "How to Deal with Conflict Avoiders", by Beverly Smallwood:



- **Use appropriate assertiveness.** Communicate in a respectful way. Refrain from verbage and voice that will foster resentment and make the conflict avoider pull back further. The key will be to put the conflict avoider at ease.
- **Encourage and create opportunities for discussion.** The conflict avoider will not take the initiative to approach you about the issues. So, create regular times for discussion in which you can exchange information. Head off problems by regular communication and sharing of ideas.
- **Respond positively when the conflict avoider risks**

sharing. Clarify and emphasize your agreements. And, then shift the focus to developing solutions. Address the problem without assigning blame. Remember there is a multitude of ways to say what you mean.

- **Do not dwell on the past.** Bringing up past issues in which the conflict avoider did not respond will not help the current situation.
- **Approach and listen.** Use empathy and try to understand his/her point of view. Make it clear that you are seeking "win-win" solutions not just asserting your side.
- **Discover and manage the conflict avoider's expectations.** The conflict avoider may be silent due to past unheard, unrequested opinions that have led to hurt feelings. Listen very carefully, ask questions and summarize the content of the discussion. Refrain from responding quickly-make sure you fully understand their issues.
- **Talk about how the feedback helps you.** Thank the conflict avoider for their time and willingness to share their side of the issue.

- **Observe the conflict avoider's body language.** What non-verbal behaviors are you noticing that can help you build your relationship with this person?
- **"Normalize" conflict as a part of the workplace.** Make statements like, "We all have things we disagree on-that's what keeps things interesting." "I don't love conflicts either but solving them moves our organization ahead."

Working with a conflict avoider may be frustrating and difficult. However, monitoring your own behaviors will be critical to establishing a relationship. It will enable you to stretch your abilities to communicate effectively, listen and problem solve under the most challenging of situations.

Ways to Control the "Shiny Object" in Meetings

Have you noticed how those wide-ranging, unfocused conversations can be time stealers in meetings? Sometimes a seemingly innocent remark can dominate the meeting and rob time from what really needs to be discussed. Then off on a tangent you go! Before you know it, this digression has taken the time allotted for the meeting itself. Meeting facilitation is always a challenge. Many variables have the possibility of taking the meeting off track. However, good meeting facilitators utilize techniques that enable the meeting to proceed without distractions. Here are some tips that can help:

- Clearly state the purpose of the meeting. The "X" of this meeting is.... When the topics begin to stray-revisit the "X" of the meeting.
- Create a written agenda with time estimates for each item. Refer to the topic and time when the discussion gets off track.
- Write the topics or items on a flipchart and post them on

the wall for all to see.

- Have one piece of flipchart paper designated as a "Parking Lot" to list topics that come up that are not significant to the current meeting.
- Direct the conversation back on track - "We've strayed from the topic, which was _____. The last few comments before we digressed were _____"
- Ask the question - "We've had trouble sticking to this point. Is there something about it that makes it so easy to avoid?"

Practice your meeting facilitation skills to create productive meetings in which time is spent in targeted, focused ways.

Resource: [The Team Handbook](#), by Peter R. Scholtes

"Meetings: Where minutes are kept and hours are lost."

PR Engle

Raising Happiness in the Workplace

Everyone knows that a happy workplace is a productive one. When KPMG decided to improve the happiness and productivity of a group of tax managers, they tried a simple solution that worked. The tax managers were asked to do one of the following tasks during the workday:

- Jot down three things you are grateful for.
- Write a positive message to someone in your social support network.
- Meditate at your desk for two minutes.
- Walk outside for 10 minutes.
- Take two minutes to write down in a journal the most meaningful experiences of the past 24 hours.

The KPMG participants mean score on the Life Satisfaction scale moved from 22.96 out of 35 (before) to 27.23 in just four months (after)-which is considered a significant increase. What effect do you think it would have on you and your team?

Resource: Shawn Achor, Harvard researcher and author of [The Happiness Advantage](#)

"Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions."

Dalai Lama

Leadership Age Flip

Are leaders getting younger? In a word - yes. As predicted, the percentage of supervisors who are younger than their subordinates is growing. And, it is no surprise that this dynamic can have its challenges. Members of the Young Entrepreneur Council in partnership with Citi, were asked to identify their advice for managing people who are older and/or more experienced than them. Here are some of the ideas that were voiced:

- Value the talents and knowledge of each of your team members regardless of age-It's about mutual respect most of all. Acknowledge their experience. At the same time remain the leader by thanking them for their input and clearly providing your decision and next steps. In other words, acknowledge their input without acquiescing your role.
- Be real with your team and don't claim expertise you don't have. People will respect you for being willing to share your strengths and weaknesses. Stay humble.
- Be honest about the things you are better at and more experienced at, but also recognize the other person's experience. Provide autonomy and freedom to them when you can. Learn from this person.
- Initiate mentoring/onboarding. Utilize past experiences and talents of the older worker to engage younger workers coming into the organization.
- Think about what motivates people. Research shows older workers are less motivated by pay and less afraid of being fired.
- Listen. Genuinely hear what is being said.
- Debate with them. Enjoy learning a different point of view.

Remember relationships take time and effort to nurture. Providing an atmosphere in which team members of all ages can effectively perform is critical for making a difference in your organization.

Minglephobia

Do you attend a business or social gathering with the intention of meeting new people but never quite make the break from the people you know? Studies show that more than 40% of all adults suffer from some sort of social anxiety. If you find mingling daunting, here are some helpful tips for your next gathering.

- Before attending the business or social function, create your own mental agenda. Make a list of people who may be there and possible topics you would discuss with them.
- Set a goal for the number of new people you want to meet. Some people put a specific number of business cards in their pocket to pass out.
- Read body language. A person standing alone may

welcome your company. Groups of 3 or more may also be approachable. However, be aware of twosomes. The old saying "Two's company, three's a crowd" may apply.

- If you don't know anyone, be honest about it. Approach a group of people, introduce yourself and say "I don't know a soul here." Most people will remember what it is like to be in your shoes.
- Remember the 10 minute rule. Stay in a group no longer than 10 minutes before moving on.
- Exit the group tactfully by excusing yourself immediately after someone else has finished speaking.
- Give yourself an intermission by talking to people you know. This will help you recharge your social energy.

Resource: [Business Etiquette in Brief - The Competitive Edge for Today's Professional](#), by Ann Marie Sabath

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