

BUILDING EMPATHY

- CA Madhukar N Hiregange

“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.”

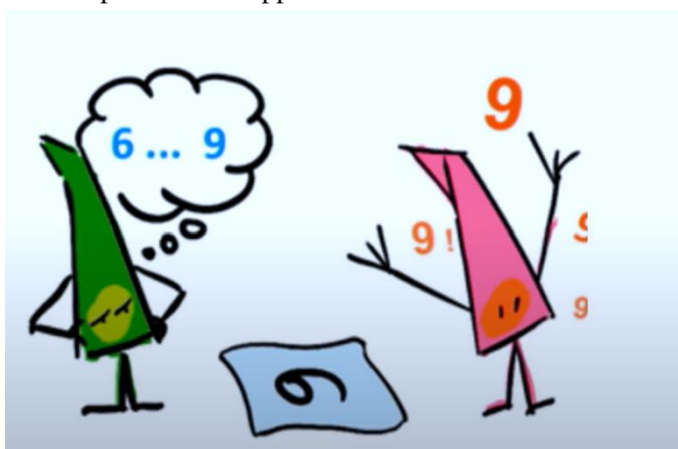
Oprah Winfrey

Empathy is patiently and sincerely seeing the world through the other person’s eyes. It is not learned in school; it is cultivated over a lifetime.

We live in a busy world, where creating connections and managing relationships are vital. An admirable quality in humans is the ability to perceive and understand thoughts and emotions and show compassion for others.

There’s a difference between being sympathetic and being empathetic to others. Let’s understand the differences between them.

- Sympathy is a reaction caused by feelings of sorrow/pity for another man’s challenges, without understanding what it’s like to be in their shoes.
- Empathy is the ability to relate yourself to one’s shoes and understand the situation, experience and emotions of that person and support them.



“Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself.”

- Mohsin Hamid

Different types of empathy

- **Cognitive empathy** - It is the ability to relate to others' situations, think in their shoes, and understand their concerns, challenges and points of view.
- **Emotional empathy** - It is the ability of being able to understand another person’s emotions.



- **Compassionate empathy** - This is when we take action after understanding another person's emotions and concerns.

People who fall in the category of being emotionally empathetic are exceptionally good at understanding one's emotional turmoil even when they are not obvious at the time. They do not judge or make decisions for others during this vulnerable time.

Indications of lack of empathy

We believe that as human beings, we are empathetic to one another. Well, the way we express our empathy differs from person to person. These are some indications of the need to help you move from no empathy to compassionate empathy.

- An instance where we delayed our work and did not revert or postpone the task due to another "urgent" work.
- "Do we usually prepare our responses while others are explaining?"
- "Are we disrupting his thought process or communication?" - A bit of nodding and supportive comments could enrich the conversation.
- "Do we get distracted by calls, people entering the room, or mobile notifications during a physical or virtual meeting?"
- "Are we engaging in some other work while keeping our video off when on a video conference with others?"
- "Do we blame others for our lack of response?"
- "Do our emails contain the right salutations, acknowledgement for opportunity or support provided, understanding a person's challenge?"
- "Do we sound impatient while communicating?"
- "Are we forgetting family and friends over work commitments?"

The advantages of empathy in profession and life are:-

1. Building a connection with your colleagues would create a more cooperative work-life environment and be more enjoyable. They would not consider you as a "blamer" but rather think of you as an independent person. An impression like that could bring you more opportunities.



2. The interpersonal relationship with different divisions of your company would be cordial and smooth, increasing the potential for a proactive team.
3. The firm would attract, engage, and retain talent better, being known for its positive, people-friendly environment
4. We can reinvent ourselves and the culture of our division or organisation to make it more valuable.

How to improve Empathy

1. Encourage regular interaction with colleagues on aspects other than work.
2. Imagine from their perspective regarding challenges and concerns.
3. Take the initiative to identify their concerns and provide the needed support.
4. Lead them with care and trust.
5. Providing them with different points of views to help them create a wise solution.
6. Do not be judgemental of anyone's challenges.
7. Support others by filling up gaps with knowledgeable resources.
8. Validate their emotions and feelings.
9. Take feedback with a positive attitude.
10. Remember, we exist because of our clients. They allow us to serve them and grow.
11. Respect the client's personnel.
12. Write and verbally acknowledge their contributions to you.
13. Keep a professional and independent attitude while taking ownership of their problem.
14. Compose clear communication to them.
15. Be open by sharing your life lessons when relevant to provide insights and guidance.
16. Involve them in decision-making when relevant.
17. Give all the credit for a job well done.
18. Take responsibility when things do not work out.

Conclusion

Building empathy is crucial because it fosters deeper understanding and connection with others, enhancing relationships both personally and professionally. It allows us to appreciate diverse perspectives, leading to more effective communication and conflict resolution. Ultimately, empathy cultivates a supportive and collaborative environment where mutual respect and trust can flourish.



Questionnaire

1. Which of the following is the most effective way to show empathy in a conversation?
 - A) Interrupt the person to share your own experiences
 - B) Listen actively without interrupting and validate their feelings
 - C) Offer solutions immediately to their problems
 - D) Change the subject to something more positive

2. Empathy can best be described as:
 - A) Feeling sorry for someone
 - B) Understanding and sharing the feelings of another
 - C) Giving advice to someone in need
 - D) Ignoring the emotions of others

3. Empathy is often divided into three types. Which of the following is NOT one of those types?
 - A) Cognitive empathy
 - B) Emotional empathy
 - C) Compassionate empathy
 - D) Logical empathy

4. When someone shares a difficult experience, the best empathetic response is to:
 - A) Offer immediate advice on how to fix the situation
 - B) Share a similar experience of your own
 - C) Acknowledge their feelings and ask if they need anything
 - D) Distract them with a different topic