

Empathy- Core Competency of Emotional Intelligence

If you have never felt a certain feeling, it will be hard for you to understand how another person is feeling. This holds equally true for pleasure and pain. If, for example, you have never put your hand in a flame, you will not know the pain of fire. If you have never felt rebellious or defiant, you will not understand those feelings. Reading about a feeling and intellectually knowing about it is very different than actually experiencing it for yourself. Similarly empathy is one of the vital elements of emotional intelligence- is to identify with another's feelings. It is to emotionally put one in the place of another. It also involves paying attention to people— things like listening, attending to needs and wants of others, and building relationships. When empathy skills are high, one is more likely to inspire the troops. People are more likely to go the extra mile. Sometime we tend to mix up empathy with compassion as such it needs little elaboration.

Compassion can be defined as a combination of empathy and understanding. Greater empathy gives you greater information, and the more information you have on something, the more likely you are to understand it. Higher emotional intelligence makes possible a greater capacity for such understanding. Thus, the logical sequence is as follows: Higher emotional sensitivity and awareness leads to higher levels of empathy. This leads to higher levels of understanding which then leads to higher levels of compassion

Empathy is closely related to compassion, but empathy both precedes compassion and is a pre-requisite for compassion. When we feel empathy for someone we are getting emotional information about them and their situation. By collecting information about other people's feelings, you get to know them better. As you get to know others on an emotional level, you are likely to see similarities between your feelings and theirs, and between your basic emotional needs and theirs. When you realize that someone else's basic emotional needs are similar to yours, you are more able to identify with them, relate to them and empathize with them. That helps much more to bring cohesive relation within an organization.

Listen with Empathy

Empathic listening (also called active listening or reflective listening) is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding and trust. Empathic listening has empowering qualities. Providing an opportunity for people to talk through their problem may clarify their thinking as well as provide a necessary emotional release

Madelyn Burley-Allen offers these guidelines for empathic listening:

1. Be attentive. Be interested. Be alert and not distracted. Create a positive atmosphere through nonverbal behavior.
2. Be a sounding board -- allows the speaker to bounce ideas and feelings off you while assuming a nonjudgmental, non-critical manner.
3. Act like a mirror.
4. Don't discount the speaker's feelings by using stock phrases like "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow."
5. Don't let the speaker "hook" you. This can happen if you get angry or upset, allow yourself to get involved in an argument, or pass judgment on the other person.
6. Indicate you are listening by
 - o Providing brief, noncommittal acknowledging responses, e.g., "Uh-huh," "I see."
 - o Giving nonverbal acknowledgements, e.g., head nodding, facial expressions matching the speaker, open and relaxed body expression, eye contact.

- Invitations to say more, e.g., "Tell me about it," "I'd like to hear about that."
- 7. Follow good listening "ground rules:"
 - Don't interrupt.
 - Don't change the subject or move in a new direction.
 - Don't rehearse in your own head.
 - Don't interrogate.
 - Don't teach.
 - Don't give advice.
 - Do reflect back to the speaker what you understand and how you think the speaker feels.

Speak with Empathy

Empathy involves real curiosity and a desire to know or understand people. There is a genuine interest in what the person is saying and feeling. You cannot have empathy without asking questions. Some typical ones are:

1. "I understand you and I am interested in being a resource to help you resolve this problem."
2. "What would help you feel better?"
3. "I will think about it."
4. "Can you say more about that?"
5. "Really? That's interesting. Can you be more specific?"
6. "I wasn't aware of that. Tell me more."
7. "I'm curious about that...let's discuss this in more depth."
8. "Let me see if I understand you correctly...here is what I hear you say..."
9. "How do you feel about that? What are some of your concerns?"
10. "I understand your problem and how you feel about it, I am interested in what you are saying and I am not judging you."

Traits of Empathy

Just as self-awareness is the foundation for good self-management, so also empathy is the foundation for good relationship management. Danielle Goleman uses five traits of empathy are given below:

Understanding others:

A very important phenomenon of empathy. When one will put himself in other's shoes only than he can realize another's problem, sorrows, grief, pleasure or pain.

An assistant at a large design firm describes the poisonous feelings emanating from a temperamental partner like this; "With a glance he became a closed door; he put up this don't-bother-me sign, so I knew to stay away from him. But I have to deal with him at some of those times, I keep it short. I don't joke or anything-I did once and he went nuts. So I get monotonous, almost moronic, with him." (The temperamental designer: William A. Kahn, Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and disengagement at work" academy of management Journal).

The key phrase here is "with a glance he became a closed door." That was the cue that told the assistant how to act around the temperamental designer partner. At work we constantly pick-up such emotional cues and adjust our behavior accordingly. Lacking such radar, we are vulnerable to ship wreck in the shoals created by the rocky emotions of those we work with. Empathy is essential as an emotional guidance system, piloting us in getting along at work.

Beyond mere survival, empathy is critical for superior performance wherever the jobs focus is on people. Whenever an artful reading of a person's feelings matters, from sales and organizational consulting to psychotherapy and medicine, as well as leadership of every kind, empathy is critical to excellence.

Developing others:

Frequency tuning is required to get reciprocal signal from other side or from a counterpart. In a similar way, one needs to develop his counterpart or subordinate in the same footing. Unless proper grooming up/coaching is done, empathy will be missing.

This is a person to person art; the heart of coaching and developing is the act of counseling. And the effectiveness of counseling hinges on empathy and the ability to focus on our own feelings and share them.

In a study of supervisors, managers, and executives in twelve large organizations, the impact of developing others was greatest among supervisors, suggesting that this skill is critical in managing those involved in front-line work-salespeople, line workers, and the like. As the realm of a manager or executive's influences, the direct opportunities for developing others may diminish, while other competencies, like leadership may emerge as more relevant.

At the same time the, helpful coach gives specific information about what is wrong, combined with corrective feedback and a positive expectation of the person's ability to improve.

Service orientation:

Customer needs to make familiar with a service or a product. Once a customer understands the comfort, usefulness, pleasure or pain of a particular service or product, in that he or she shall realize or feel for that.

In the broader organization, everyone has "customers". To shine at services we need to monitor the satisfaction of the customers, not waiting to hear the complaints but freely offering information that might be without self interest motivating the gestures. This lays the ground work for a trusting relationship., one here the clients or coworkers will feel a positive regard and start to see us as a source of reliable and helpful information-evaluating the relationship above one simply buyer and seller.

Similarly, how the customer feel when they interact with an employee determines how they feel about the company itself. In a psychological sense, the "company" as experienced by the customer is these interactions. Loyalty is lost or strengthened in every interaction between a company and its customers. The purpose of business is not to make a sale, but to make and keep customers.

Leveraging diversity:

Take advantage of various groups of people. One is to understand, respect diverse rules, environment so as to feel from his point of view. To earn empathy the feeling is to come from different sections of people.

One of the watchwords at the Harvard Business School is "Success through others who are different from yourself". This is strengthening in difference, and this makes the ability to leverage diversity an increasingly crucial manners.

The vastly greater variety of people working in organizations of every kind demands a greater awareness of the subtle distortions that stereotypes and bias bring to working relationships. Among managers, for example being able to read people accurately, without the distortions of emotionally laden stereotypes, sets superior performers apart from average.

We generally have difficulty reading the subtle nonverbal signals of emotion in those who belong to groups very different from our own-whether a different gender, race, nationality, or ethnic group. Every group has its own norms for expressing emotion, and to the extent we are unfamiliar with those norms, empathizing grows more difficult. As we have seen, a failure of empathy can throw any interaction off-key,

making both people uncomfortable and creating an emotional distance, which in turn encourages us to view the other person through the lens of a group stereotype rather than see him or her as an individual.

The missing ingredient in many diversity programs is that they fail to take advantage of diversity by using it to help participants learn how to do their business better. It's all well and good to make people of diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and welcome at work but we can go further, leveraging diversity to heighten performance across the board.

These principles point the way to what David Thomas and Robin Ely contend in a Harvard Business Review article, can be the potential benefits of leveraging diversity: heightened profitability, enhanced organizational learning, flexibility, and rapid adaptation to shifting markets.

When leaders of organizations value the insights brought to work by people of diverse backgrounds, it can lead to organizational learning that boosts competitiveness. Take a financial services company whose sales model had focused on rapid-fire cold calls, until it realized that its most successful salespeople were women who used a sales approach more in keeping with their gender style: the slow, sure building of relationships. This company now takes a more flexible approach to sales encouraging and rewarding the differing styles that work better for salespeople of different backgrounds. The company was able to use the insight offered by the women's success to question its own assumptions, learn, and change and so do better by leveraging diversity.

Political awareness:

To understand others mind one need to understand his/ her social network, cultural Orientation, other influencing factors if there are which drives their views. This would vary from country to country, religion to religion or one area to another area.

The ability to read political realities is vital to the behind-the-scenes networking and coalition building that allows someone to wield influence- no matter what their professional role. Mediocre performers lack such social acumen and so betray a distressingly low level of political savvy.

Every organization has its own invisible nervous system of connection and influence. Some people are oblivious to this below –the-radar world, while others have it fully on their own screen. Skill at reading the currents that influence the *real* decision makes depends on the ability to empathize on an organizational level, not just an interpersonal one.

People who maintain rich personal networks in an organization typically are savvy about what is going on, and this social intelligence extends to understanding the larger realities that affect the client organization. For example, knowing how to read the currents in the client organization typifies people outstanding in corporate sales. One politically savvy star performer gave this example. "An executive VP who was relatively new on the board was arising star and a favorite son of the president of the corporation we sell to. He was really the decision maker. He had carte blanche from the president. Here found that fostering a relationship with him was very much to our benefit and the key to the sale."(Key to the sale: Spencer and Spencer, competence at work)

Outstanding performers in most organizations share this ability. Among managers and executives generally, this emotional competence distinguishes superior performers; their ability to read situations objectively, without the distorting lens of their own biases or assumptions, allows, them to respond effectively-and the further up the organizational ladder the more this matters. (Boyatzis, The Competent Manager)

People who do this well are able to distance themselves a bit, setting aside their own emotional involvement in events to see with more objectivity. For example, when faced with a conflict within their organization, they can take multiple perspectives, describing with some accuracy the position of each person involved. This is true despite the fact that all of us encounter few events-especially emotionally loaded ones-about which we have no opinion or feeling. This emotional competence builds on both emotional self-

control and empathy, allowing people to see clearly rather than be swayed by their own point of view.

The bottom line is empathy is a key to understand others better which might be the tonic to further human efficiency for any organization. A simple way **to read others' emotions are feeling**. Learning how to notice others' feelings is a key skill. The bull's-eye is Needs and Values. Learning how to recognize what others need and value is the top skill for having empathy. It takes a lot of **training and practice** for people to get emotionally intelligent at recognizing others' feelings, needs, and values.