

DEVELOPING EMPATHY

ETHICAL CULTURE TOOLKIT



Introduction

We tend to think of empathy as a personal quality: you either have it or you don't. But empathy simply refers to your appreciation of the emotions another person is experiencing. While some have a natural talent for empathy, most people can improve empathy as a skill. The most important step is learning to give someone your full attention.

For business leaders, empathy can make a definitive difference in organizational culture. An empathetic leader demonstrates care for employees and customers, develops stronger relationships, and sees opportunities to help others grow.

This Toolkit shows you how to improve your empathy skills and encourage empathy in others to the benefit of your organization.

**WHAT SEPARATES HUMANS
FROM OTHER ANIMALS IS
OUR EMPATHY**

Andy Dunn

BERC
BUSINESS ETHICS RESOURCE CENTER
powered by U.S. Bank

DEVELOPING EMPATHY FLOWCHART

This flowchart maps out the activities in this Toolkit. Feel free to complete these steps over time. It's more important and effective to build empathy authentically than to try to fake it.

1. Understand cognitive empathy.
2. Take the time to listen.
3. Learn emotional cues.
4. Practice, practice, practice!



**EMPATHY IS A TOOL FOR BUILDING
PEOPLE INTO GROUPS**

Neil Gaiman

COGNITIVE EMPATHY

Empathy encompasses several different reactions. Learn the difference between emotional empathy and cognitive empathy to develop your leadership skills.

"Empathy" may make you think of feeling pity or sympathy. That type of reaction is referred to as "emotional" empathy. Before responding emotionally, though, it's important to understand what the other person is actually feeling. The ability to make that judgment is called "cognitive empathy."

Cognitive empathy does not require a specific emotional response. Cognitive empathy means that you can discern what someone is feeling and imagine how it may be impacting them.

For business leaders, cognitive empathy helps determine the motivations, desires, and needs of team members and others. It avoids emotional decision-making, and allows for clear thinking about how to react respectfully and appropriately.



ACTIVE LISTENING



Empathy is about understanding the other person, and there are no shortcuts. While the techniques in this Toolkit will help build your empathetic skills, listening is essential. Use this list to review your own listening habits.

- Pay attention. Let the other person to speak without interruption. Stop other tasks and fully listen.
- Allow for silence. If the person needs to gather thoughts, it's ok to give them time. Likewise, take a moment to digest what they said before responding.
- Be open. Use positive body language to encourage the other person and to show your attention. Lean in and focus.
- Validate. You can encourage sharing by showing you appreciate what the person experienced. Statements like "That must have been awful" or "That sounds like a scary situation" show your concern.
- Do not judge. Conclusory or judgmental statements stop the conversation and close off communication.

WHEN YOU SHOW DEEP EMPATHY TOWARD OTHERS, THEIR DEFENSIVE ENERGY GOES DOWN, AND POSITIVE ENERGY REPLACES IT.

Stephen Covey

BERC
BUSINESS ETHICS RESOURCE CENTER
powered by U.S. Bank

LEARN TO READ THE SIGNS



Most people learn how to choose their words with care. Those words may give a different message than what they are really feeling. With a few body language basics (and some practice), you'll be better able to figure out when someone has something on their mind.

- **Crossed arms or legs:** Crossing is a subconscious physical defense. Someone with crossed arms may not be open to the topic of conversation. Try to notice at what point they crossed their arms or legs. Was it when a particular topic or person came up? (Keep in mind that someone may be cold, and that people wearing skirts may cross their legs from habit.) Uncrossed or open posture is more likely to indicate ease and affinity.
- **Slouching:** If someone makes themselves smaller or "hides" during a conversation (by standing partway out of a doorway, for instance), it suggests avoidance. They may be uncomfortable about the topic.
- **Fidgeting:** If someone cannot seem to keep still, they may be distracted or nervous, or even bored.

LEARN TO READ THE SIGNS, CONTINUED

- **Eye contact:** Eye contact typically indicates comfort, but be aware that eye contact is considered rude in some cultures. And while we are on the eyes, rapid blinking may mean that the person is holding back strong emotion or opinions.
- **Lips:** Lip biting may mean that the person is stressed or uncertain, while lips that are pursed or pressed together may show disapproval.
- **Orientation:** Which way does the person turn their head or feet? Often, this indicates the direction they would like to go. Is it toward something in particular or away from you? On the other hand, orientation to you indicates engagement and possible agreement.
- **Arms akimbo (hands on the hips):** This pose may be angry, confrontational, or aggressive.
- **Blocking:** If someone holds an object between you, it's another indication of discomfort, similar to arm-crossing. The object (such as a book or phone) serves to shield the person holding it.
- **Mirroring:** If a person seems to mirror your neutral or positive body language (leaning in when you do, for instance), that may indicate that they are on the same page and feeling in tune with you. (Tip: Try mirroring others on purpose to help them view you favorably.)



**EMPATHY [IS] THE CAPACITY TO
UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY WAR IS
BOTH WON AND LOST**

Barbara Kingsolver

MAKE IT ABOUT YOU

Using "I" Statements for Empathy



It might seem counterintuitive, but talking about yourself can help you build empathy. "I" statements are sentences about you that build rapport with someone so you can learn about their feelings and needs.

When listening to a team member or customer, you may have a good idea of their emotional state. One way to clarify that in a non-confrontational way is to respond with an "I" statement. These statements refer to your own state of mind, and allow the other person to tell you more.

Example: An employee is talking about a project, and seems agitated. After giving him your full attention, you might respond with "I understand that this could be stressful." You could expand on that point, or stop and allow the employee to give you more information.

Not all "I" statements start with "I." Other self-focused statements also qualify.

- My concern is that...
- What I am hearing you say is...
- When facing a deadline, I find that...

The "I" statement reflects something that you know is accurate because it's about you. You are not making an assumption about the other person, but speaking from your perspective, and giving them a chance to give you more information.

EMPATHY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Here are some easy ways to develop your cognitive empathy skills.

- Spend time with kids: Children -- especially small children -- are still learning to express emotions verbally. Interacting with kids can be an education in non-verbal communication.
- And animals: Dogs, cats, horses, and other domesticated animals give recognizable cues to their state of mind.
- Practice "I" statements: Try sitting down with a friend or family member to listen without interruption for five minutes. Ask your friend to talk about anything they like, and just listen for five minutes. At the end, try an "I" statement about your observations (such as "What I'm hearing is that you feel . . ."). Check with your friend on your accuracy. (Make sure to explain that you are looking for low-stakes practice before you start!)





PRACTICE YOUR COGNITIVE EMPATHY

Tuning in to how others are feeling takes attention and practice. Fortunately, pop culture provides many ways to test and improve your skills. Movies and television use talented actors who tell a story with their physicality as well as with their dialogue. If you know someone who always guesses plot twists, they may be picking up on those cues.

To practice, pick a movie or show you've already seen (and don't mind watching again!), especially one where a character is trying to keep something secret. There are probably many clues in the action and dialogue that point to the issue. Print this page and take notes on the following questions:

- Do the actor's facial expressions match the dialogue? Why or why not?
- What body language cues does the actor give about the character's state of mind? Do they cross their arms? Fidget? Slouch?
- What conversational techniques does the character use to avoid certain topics? Do they change the subject? Pick an argument? Busy themselves with something else?