

The 12 Facets of Empathy



By
Ken Buist

EMPATHY

In ancient architecture, the cornerstone was the vital part of a building. It ensured that the whole construction was true and would hold strong. If the cornerstone were made of inferior material, the stresses would ultimately pull the structure apart. Properly in place, however, the cornerstone guaranteed that the building was robust and would remain upright.

Empathy is the cornerstone of rapport and influence. Without it we are left with a derelict group of practices that consist of either domination, or manipulation. These would yield only short-term results, and are no basis for winning and maintaining trust. Besides any moral considerations, they fail to produce long-term success. Empathy builds people together. It also ensures that when trying to influence, we use that which is appropriate. Inappropriate influence will actually have the reverse effect.

DIVERSE DEFINITIONS.

Empathy has been described as: *“Understanding and entering into the feelings of another”* I prefer not to attribute that definition because I would argue that it is inadequate. Empathy is far more than feelings and it is highly practical besides. One could argue that it is as “hard” a skill as numeracy and as evidential as the ability to read. Because it has so many applications it is capable of a diversity of definitions. The following paper which outlines ‘The 12 Facets of Empathy’, it is not presented as an exhaustive examination of this skill however if observed they will greatly enhance rapport.

THE 12 FACETS OF EMPATHY

1. Sensing the feelings of others.

Having the competency to be in touch with the feelings of another person through ones own feelings. This is often achieved intuitively but that does not mean it is an emotional equivalent of clairvoyancy. We sense people’s feelings by having registered in our lives that certain vocal tones, facial expressions, body language, and mannerisms, indicate particular feelings. As we observe them in those with whom we interact, there is a neurological shortcut that puts us in touch, without having to go through the laborious routine of questioning, analysing, and remembering.

Very small signs can indicate a great deal to those with highly attuned empathetic skills. Even variations in the length of time between questions and answers can reveal feelings .Empathy is about sensing what is being transmitted without being vocalized.

2. Taking the emotional temperature.

We all have feelings about things. Empathy includes the skill of recognising if others are cool towards an idea, or hot about it. The same is true of news they receive, or the way in which a new person is introduced to a team or meeting.

We may not know the reason for the feelings, or even be too sure exactly what those feelings are, but we have taken the temperature. We discern a change and can tell if it is of a positive or negative nature. This informs us to be watchful, discreet, cautious, but not timid.

3. Showing tact.

Empathetic people recognise discomfort and sensitivity within others over issues and situations. They respond accordingly and show thoughtfulness about what they say, how their remarks are framed, and the degree of gravity or humour that is appropriate. This is more than simply wanting to avoid offence: it is based on a true assessment of the feelings, values, and attitudes of another, leading to deliberate choices and behaviours.

4. Being genuinely interested.

Politicians do not kiss babies because they are tender hearted towards infants! Their interest is in the adult vote and the public impression they give. Genuine interest in others is expressed through being totally focused on them during interactions, making a point of remembering their issues, asking questions about what keeps them awake and where the pain is in their working day.

Empathetic people display a concern that goes beyond simply providing a solution. The client is a person with issues, not a prospect in need of a product. The empathetic leave people feeling valued, not just another project.

5. Discerning another's perspectives.

By listening carefully, observing thoroughly, and remembering accurately, the empathizer will go beyond recording the client's ideas and preferences, to the place of *"Seeing where they are coming from"*. This is one of those highly empathetic phrases that has entered and enriched the English language in recent years. It reflects a growing desire and ability to appreciate that we each have our own perspectives on almost every subject.

To discern another's perspectives does not mean that we share, or even understand, them. It means that we recognise the impact those perspectives have on the issue at hand and are therefore able to take them into account.

6. Demonstrating support for ideas.

Generally speaking, empathy is expressed by being supportive, encouraging, affirming, inclusive and up building. It involves us in taking the time and trouble to comment favourably and show appreciation. The crux of this is the person, not the value of their contribution.

Self-worth is built up by showing the significance of the individual through the recognition of their thoughts. Even when we profoundly disagree, there is an empathetic way of doing so that will provide the other party with a dignified way of giving up their viewpoint.

7. Recognition of motives.

Empathy takes us behind the plans and schemes to the underlying forces that drive people. To develop this skill, there is no substitute for asking questions like "Besides making a profit on this, what other objectives do you want to fulfill?"

Reasonable, gently probing inquiries enable us to check their responses against what we feel to be the case. Obviously there is no guarantee we will always be told the entire truth, or even that the other party is entirely in touch with their own motives. However, time will out, and we learn to use this gift by observing its effectiveness. One note of caution is appropriate here. We must never use our skill at recognising motives to become accusative or suspicious. The other person must always be honoured.

8. Serving their objectives.

Empathetic individuals will not content themselves with knowing the motives, but are concerned to enable their clients to achieve their goals. Success is measured in the fulfillment of the plans of others. Empathetic people therefore do not force their agenda onto others but draw out the dreams and wishes, offering ideas that enable the other party to develop a strategy. This is more than just agreeing to help.

Empathizers embrace the motivational drive and personal perspective of their clients and add those to the overall mix of objectives.

When N.A.S.A. set out to put an American on the moon it was more than a technological project. The N.A.S.A. leadership knew that there were political and emotional agendas connected with the national pride of their masters. Keeping in tune with it all was essential if the vast investment in research and development were to be maintained.

9. Intuiting the thoughts of others.

Empathy involves getting inside the other persons' shoes. It is about their feelings, motives, longings and thinking. We need to know if someone's thoughts are anxious, muddled, selfish, desperate, clear, constructive, principled, and everything else! This is about listening for consistency as much as logic. It requires observing the manner of communication as well as the content. It demands out attention and analysis, as well as tuning into our gut feelings.

This is not about mind games but about that which is communicated between people everyday without any attention to the process. It is largely about watching for reactions and responses to what is said and done. The slightest movements of eyes and mouths can deliver more eloquent expressions of inner thoughts than many carefully worded statements.

10. Empathizers anticipate problems.

Being empathetic is more than inter-personal. It includes interacting with groups, organisations and the future. Those with empathetic skills are able to consider the impact of issues on others and identify the difficulties. This is not about pessimism but about exploring the effects of events yet to occur, by reference to one's knowledge of people.

When the British government awarded an annual increase in the state pension of 75pence per week, it led to a national outcry. It appeared that no one in the cabinet had been able to predict the likely response. The nation was astounded that the government expected to escape severe criticism. We will have to wait the statutory 30 years before we will know if the entire cabinet was without an empathetic voice!

11. Sensitive to the needs of others

Empathetic people feel what others need. This may mean reassurance, or encouragement, direction, or a friendly ear. There is no "one-size-fits-all" for those with empathetic dispositions. Each person is an individual and their lives are complex, therefore needs vary according to situations, seasons, and personal circumstances. Empathy expresses itself in recognising particular needs and seeking to fulfill them.

12. Empathetic people are considerate.

This is especially true when individuals are struggling and encountering difficulty, or opposition. Encouragement is more than the proverbial kick up the backside; it has to have persuasive and rational elements. General Custer encouraged his troops to believe they were invincible under his command. His degree of influence was based on authority and his reasoning proved to be fatally irrational. Empathy is considerate. This means it weighs up the issues a person faces and evaluates the reasonableness of their concerns.

Empathy is far more than feeling what another feels, because this skill is not about the abandonment of the thought processes. It is about the full deployment of cognitive reasoning allied to emotional intelligence and good observational skills.

EMPATHY IS POSSIBLE FOR EVERYONE

Empathy cannot simply be regarded as “Useful if you have it”. It is the core skill for exercising influence and building rapport. Unfortunately, there are those who prefer to believe that any form of emotional intelligence is outside their realm. Usually this is just an excuse for being lazy!

Empathy is not a mysterious science. It is a skill that can be developed. By practicing the principles of this competency we can develop the inner responses that lead to the outer behaviours. This might mean a rather wooden or mechanistic start, as you shed the taboos of a lifetime, which have prevented this competency from being allowed to develop. For some it means allowing your feelings to exercise a little more authority within your responses and relationships. Adjusting to a more people oriented perspective is a skill that will serve you greatly in building rapport.

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Written by **Ken Buist** who is an author, speaker and the founder of **The Trusted Adviser™ - Leaders In Personal Transformation**. He and his specialist team work globally and in the UK with clients such as: **HVS International, DHL, LogicaCMG, AIG, Reuters, Dow, Topshop Topman**. The team are dedicated to transforming individuals and teams into both internal and external Trusted Advisers. He is also a published author on topics such as, **Emotional Maturity, Behavioural Transformation, Personal Gifting, Character Development** and his latest book ‘**Trust Me**’.

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