

Leading With Empathy

EMPATHY SURVEY

Use the survey below to reflect on how well you demonstrate empathy. First rate how you see yourself and then rate how you believe others see you.

How Do You See Yourself?			
Question	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually
When talking to others, do you fully listen to what they're saying (i.e., you don't try to multi-task, think about your response to what they're saying, nor compare yourself to them)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In times of crisis, are you tough, committed, and decisive, as well as compassionate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you assign tasks or accept a mission, do you think about the impact it will have on your subordinates and their welfare?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Do Others See You?			
Question	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually
When talking to others, do you <i>demonstrate</i> both directly and indirectly (by what you say and how you say it) that you're fully listening to what they're saying?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In times of crisis, do you <i>show</i> your subordinates that you're tough, committed, and decisive, as well as compassionate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you assign tasks or accept a mission, do you <i>show/talk to</i> your subordinates about how you see it impacting their welfare and how you plan to support them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you receive feedback (either in-person or via an online assessment), is it generally in line with what you expect (i.e., there aren't big surprises)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

STEPS FOR DEVELOPING AN EMPATHETIC MINDSET

Leaders can learn and practice thinking empathetically using the following steps:

Step 1: Recognize that “you don’t know what you don’t know”

Avoid making assumptions about others based on what you think you know about them. Don’t assume that because you have experienced a similar situation before, that you know exactly how they feel. Making preconceived notions can affect how you interpret a situation and hinder your ability to exercise empathy. For example, if you meet with a subordinate who is experiencing a financial hardship, don’t assume that they are impacted the same way or that the issue is the same as your own experience.

Step 2: Consider how you form assumptions and come to conclusions

Thinking about this will help you understand how accurate your assumptions are and how those assumptions influence you. To help you become more self-aware of how you formulate assumptions, you can use The Ladder of Conclusion. The rungs in the Ladder of Conclusion include:

Rung in the Ladder	Description
1. Observe	Your observations and experiences form the ladder’s base. These observations and experiences include what you hear people say or see them do. This is the most objective rung in the ladder.
2. Select Data	Based on your observations, you select certain data or information to pay attention to.
3. Add Meaning to Data	You attach meaning to the data you selected. For example, when someone tells you something, you may interpret the meaning of what they said differently than someone else.
4. Make Assumptions	You make assumptions based on how you interpret the data. For example, based on how you interpreted previous experiences, you use that to formulate an assumption about a similar situation.
5. Draw Conclusions	You draw conclusions based on your assumptions. For example, since something similar happened in the past, you may be more likely to think the root issue, solution, and outcomes will be the same as in the past.
6. Adopt Beliefs	You adopt beliefs on the conclusions you draw.
7. Take Actions	Based on your beliefs, you are more likely to take certain actions based on your experiences.

Step 3: Keep your eyes and ears open

This step involves paying attention to what others say and do, as well as what they *don't* say and do.

Behavior	Description
Listen to hear meaning behind what the other person is saying and doing.	To do this, pay attention to direct and indirect communication like tone of voice, pace of speech, facial expressions, and gestures.
Be an active listener.	You can do this verbally by paraphrasing, clarifying, and summarizing what they say. You can also match your words, tone, and pace of speech to the other person. In addition, you can use nonverbal techniques including how you orient your body, making eye contact, pausing to listen as they speak, nodding or signaling that you're following what is being said, and matching your body posture and gestures to them.
Pay attention to performance behavior.	You should consider the kinds of decisions they make, how they prioritize time, and if they have changes in their behavior.
Confront serious and challenging issues.	Empathy doesn't mean condoning poor behavior. If you discover a serious or challenging issue, confront it using empathetic communication.

Step 4: Practice empathy

Use empathy to work with others and be a more effective leader.