



Empathy

Forward Thinkers constantly collaborate with others and strive to identify with and understand another person's situation, feelings, and motives.

Forward Thinkers realize that by investing in those around us, we make them feel valued and respected. With respect come trust and a desire to put forth the effort to make change happen. A small change toward a more empathetic style will allow you to construct a plan of action with your teammates that will not only drive business, but also build relationships that inspire a passion to succeed.

Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is when a person experiences a certain feeling or affinity to something another person in the relationship also has or is experiencing. We know that at times, sympathy is an important, if not necessary, quality. However, from a developmental perspective, we can support others by simply being aware or sensitive to their feelings, thoughts and experiences without having had the feelings, thoughts or experiences ourselves.

This distinction between empathy and sympathy is something to consider when building your Forward Thinking leadership skill. When we are empathetic, we know awareness is key. Without awareness, you can not become fully present in any situation and provide your full attention, garner the trust from the other party and ask the right questions to ultimately drive the solution.

Many people ask, "How do I become more aware?" The answer is simple to put into words, but when put into action, can take time and practice. To become more aware of your surroundings, you need to slow down. In addition to being present, slowing down involves setting boundaries and saying no.

Slowing down is a critical, self-awareness component to empathy. It allows you to prepare yourself to understand the reasons for another's behavior and to listen attentively. Understanding

behaviors and listening attentively are critical to a Forward Thinking leader's ability to be empathetic.

Understanding the reasons for another's behavior – really listening to what they are saying – is a skill worth developing. One way to understand the reasons for the behavior of another is to listen attentively. Listening attentively allows you to track patterns and ask questions that will save time and improve results. Forward Thinkers set aside distractions and focus in on the present situation. How many times have you found yourself thinking about something else while participating in a meeting or talking with someone about a project? Forward Thinkers realize that an investment of time and effort in the beginning will pay dividends down the road with promotions and quality of life issues.

Initially, the time it takes to understand the reasons for another's behavior and to empathize with him or her may seem to delay what needs to get done. However, in a business climate that is moving faster and adding more responsibilities to management, can we afford not to develop a critical skill such as the ability to listen or the ability to empathize? Listening to someone and understanding the reasons for his or her behavior does not mean you have to agree with the opinion or the behavior. It does, however, empower Forward Thinkers because they understand the motivations of their teammates and therefore can make better educated and researched choices.

Editors note: For further information about the topic of slowing down go to www.forwardthought.net/articles.asp and read "Slowing Down – Just may make your more efficient"

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