Donald Frank

Interpersonal Communication (COMM 218)

D.A. Hermach

Assignment: Empathy Paper

Date Due: 7/13/2017

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**Empathy Paper**

# 1. Provide a brief description of the relationship and why you chose it. (10 points)

**Valentina is my first biological child that is being raised primarily by her grandmother (my mother). I have been fortunate enough to remain in her life; and, although a child/parent relationship exists between us, we have a close friendship similar to siblings.**

**I chose my relationship with my firstborn because she is a fifteen year old sophomore in high school that is facing adolescent/young adult challenges. She is living with the stress and real life pressure of having to achieve, while still developing physically and emotionally through adolescence.**

**Being that I love my daughter very much, I am using this opportunity to challenge myself to understand her thoughts and emotions in the following ways:**

* **putting myself into her shoes**
* **writing an interpretation from her perspective**
* **asking for her reflection on my interpretation**
* **opening up a new form of communication**

**Ultimately, I chose Valentina to show her that I care about her feelings, and try my best to relate.**

# 2. Identify the issue (situation) with which you are attempting to empathize.

# (10 points)

**The situation in which I am trying to empathize is receiving a “B” grade in**

**freshman Geometry. This is the first grade received for any high school class that was less than an “A”. The stigma of finishing high school without a “4.0” is now a reality – *a blemish of character and a mark of underachievement*. I now have to cope and move on.**

# 3. Describe *in first person* how the other person views that issue. (15 points)

**Oh snap, I got a “B”. I really feel the grade that I received is unfair because I had an “A” for practically the whole semester, up until Mr. Hellwege got sick. Then the sub, Ms. Sanesi, came in and she didn’t care about us students or teaching the class. I literally taught myself!**

**Of course my dad doesn’t understand. He is going to say that there is no excuse for under performing, and that I should find a way to achieve in any situation or environment. He’s going to attribute the “B” to my work ethic or lack thereof. I know that he is not mad at me or disappointed in me. If anything he tells me that I should treat this situation as a learning experience, and grow from it.**

**Gma, on the other hand, blames my social life and social media for the “B”.**

**I am really not all that into social media; at least not as much as gma thinks. I value my friends and “streaks” on instagram and snapchat, but really don’t put in that much effort into those relationships.**

**What people don’t realize is that I am the most hurt by the “B”. I really wanted to finish high school with a perfect “4.0”. I look up to my peers with the “4.0”. During high school district swimming finals, how is the announcer going to introduce me?**

**– *“Swimming in lane 4 is Valentina Cervantes–Frank, a sophomore at Sheldon High School with less than a 4.0 – who will work at Mc Donald’s for the rest of her post high school life!”***

**My grandmother tells me that colleges will only look at applicants with a GPA of 3.85 or higher. She also tells me that I will need to get scholarships and/or financial aid/student loans to attend college.**

**I feel a lot of pressure to succeed! I work very hard – *even though my family doesn’t think so*. My dad says I live a life of privilege, but he doesn’t understand what I go through.**

**I wish my mother was still alive. She valued my happiness over achievement. I know she would say something silly like**

**– *“yeah, Geometry is tough with all those shapes and stuff”***

**Then she would ask me about boys, and tell me stories about her high school days.**

**My friends really help me cope with the situation. I know life will go on. And I will stay on top of academic grades for the remainder of my education.**

# 4. Provide a description of the interaction in which you asked your chosen person for his/her feedback on your first-person description. (5 points)

**I allowed my daughter to read my interpretation of her view of the**

**situation in private; then, asked her for feedback. Her initial reaction was**

**that my interpretation was “basically spot on”. Furthermore, she said that**

**some parts sounded like that she had written the description herself.**

**After further discussion, she explained that my description of how she felt that I felt toward the situation wasn’t exactly correct. She said that she knew that I wasn’t mad. Her takeaway of the situation was that I instructed her to learn the skill of self teaching. I wanted her to know that it wasn’t the end of the world, and that she needs to learn how to thrive in any situation without having excuses.**

**My firstborn explained to me that her grandmother made her feel “bad”,**

**and that her grandmother attributed her having a boyfriend and**

**social interactions for the “B”.**

**She revealed that she feels that her grandmother was more hurt by the “B”**

**than she was. Also, she expressed that she didn’t think that she would**

**finish high school with a 4.0. In her mind, she is striving for a 3.9 or**

**better.**

**She opened up about the pressure she feels as a result of being held to a**

**certain standard of achievement to emulate her aunt’s career of being a**

**Pysch Nurse Practitioner. She admitted that she doesn’t work as hard as she could in her classes. Her strategy for success is to do the least amount of work possible in a class to achieve an “A”; however, she put forth more effort into Geometry than any other class, and still got a “B”.**

**She does miss her mom, and admitted that she could have used her mom’s light heartedness to help her cope with the situation. She explained that she ranted on social media. Her feedback from her friends was positive**

**– *i.e. “you’re still the smartest person I know”, “it’s only one B”, “it will all even out in the end”***

**It made her realize that a “B” is not the end of the world.**

5 Describe how your attempt to empathize changed the way you might relate to that other person. (10 points)

**My attempt to empathize with my daughter changed the way that I might relate to her by making me more aware of her true feelings; thus, creating self-motivation to become a better active listener in our relationship. I learned that my assertion of advice was not the best response style. I remember our initial conversation about the “B”. Reflecting on the situation, I would have been a better dad and friend to respond with a supportive message. It really shocked me that her take away was that I wanted her to practice “self teaching”. My intended message was – “*it’s not the end of the world*”. Instead, she found that support from social media and her friends.**

**I also learned that my vicarious assumptions of her attitude toward schooling was wrong! I had to really bite my tongue when she told me that she exerts bare-minimum effort to achieve “A’s” in her classes. I was about to offer a whole lot of ADVICE, but I relied on empathy to take her perspective. High school and adolescence is a period in life in which many physiological and psychological aspects change – persons of this age search for supportive relationships – and I want to be my daughter’s support. She is a very talented young lady with a maturity and level of emotional intelligence well beyond her years. But I have to be able to relate without judgment to truly empathize and connect with her on a supportive level.**

**The most important change that I need to implement is to not make the assumption that I know what my daughter feels because I have gone through adolescence. She is a unique individual with her own set of values and beliefs that is growing up in a different time than I. If I want to truly empathize with her, I need to challenge myself to understand her as a person before I try to understand the situation. And above all else be supportive.**