

Extending Empathy

A. Reading emotions in others

Before you can extend empathy, you first must become skilled at reading emotions in others. The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley has a great online quiz (http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei_quiz/) to help you read the emotions of others. The quiz shows you how to read the key zones of the face (eyes, nose, mouth, head tilt) to correctly identify emotions in others.

In addition, vocal cues and body language add additional layers of meaning. Consider how the following vocal cues affect the meaning of a person's communication:

- Intensity = volume or loudness
- Pitch = how high or low the sound is (similar to musical scale)
- Intonation = how our voice rises and falls with certain words or meanings
- Pace = rate of talking or the speed
- Enunciation = how clearly syllables are spoken or articulated
- Silence = nonvocal aspects like pauses, sighs, and gasps

The Science of People organization has another great online quiz to help you decode body language more accurately. Learn more at <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/body-language/>

Remember, our brain is designed to read these cues in others, but we lose most of the relevant information when we go online. If you are experiencing challenges in your communication, shift to in-person interactions. If that is not possible, then at least use video where you have visual and auditory cues. The most biologically deprived form is email or texting because we lose all of the data our brains were built to assess.

B. Extending empathy

Review the four qualities of empathy by watching the short animation video "Brené Brown on Empathy" on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>.

Reflect on times you have been on the receiving end of sympathy and someone used the phrase "at least..." to you. What was the situation and how did it make you feel?

Contrast that with a time someone engaged with you from a place of genuine empathy. What did they do and say? How did it make you feel?

Consider a few colleagues at your work now. How could you practice the four qualities of empathy with them?

1. The ability to take the perspective of another person or recognize that their perspective is their truth
2. Staying out of judgment
3. Recognizing emotions in other people and then communicating that to them (e.g., me too)
4. Feeling with people—instead of projecting how you would feel in the same situation, seeing how they are feeling and getting in touch with your own experience of that feeling

Explore the impact that blame has on empathy by watching the short animation video “Brené Brown on Blame” on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZWf2_2L2v8.

Reflect on a time you did a “Damn you, Steve” moment similar to what Brené shared.

In your organization, how often do people engage in looking for who/what to blame? Jot down some examples of times you have witnessed and/or participated in it.

Research shows that blame is simply the discharging of discomfort and pain. In the situations you just listed, what was the underlying discomfort or pain that was being expressed? How could you help guide your organization to a more productive pattern?