

Empathy Framework helps leaders emit, understand range of emotions

By Denise Deveau

November 30, 2018

Colleagues at all levels should understand customers, evaluate situations, and realize how actions affect others.

Many of us can recall seeing the image, early this year, of President Trump's notes while hosting the Parkland shooting victims' families.

There, for all to see on the small White House notepaper, was the now-infamous hand-printed bullet point: "I hear you."

The need for empathy is becoming an increasingly sought-after skillset for today's leaders. In an ideal world, empathy should be something that comes naturally without the need for written cue cards. But that is not always the case.

The Center for Creative Leadership report *Empathy in the Workplace: A Tool for Effective Leadership* notes that ineffective managers make up half of the organizational management pool. It also states that one of the critical skills

that can improve a leader's chance of success is empathy.

Carol Lempert, keynote speaker and executive coach, describes empathy as the third dimension of executive presence.



Keynote Speaker, Carol Lempert: "a leader who can tap into what a person is feeling has emotional competency—or empathy."

"The first is what people see when they look at you. The second is what they hear in your voice. The third is what

people feel when they are in your presence. If you, as a leader, can tap into what a person is feeling, and make them feel good about themselves, that is emotional competency or empathy."

When working with leaders, Lempert starts with an "empathy framework" that shows the core emotions that comprise human behaviour: glad, sad, mad, afraid and shamed. Within each there are three levels of intensity, ranging from low to high.

For example, fear can range from feeling anxious at the lowest level to the highest level of panic. "By understanding those levels, you can build awareness about what someone is feeling at any given moment in time," she explains. The next step is learning to manage your own emotions within that framework. "What coping mechanisms do you have in place if they are getting out of control?"

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For example, you can apply practical tools such as breathing or giving voice to your feelings without accusing the other person.”

The empathy factor is not just something that leaders should demonstrate. It also needs to be instilled in the workforce. This is especially true in an increasingly automated world in which empathy is becoming a more highly valued asset in customer-facing roles. “Staff need to listen deeply to what is driving what customers and colleagues feel. This gives you an insight into it is they need from you,” Lempert notes.

Empathy is at the heart of employee and manager training programs at Group Germain Hotels in Québec, where staff must interact with guests and colleagues on a daily basis. Sylvie Dionne, director of culture and talent, says the company has developed several training modules on how to create emotional connections with guests and co-workers.

During sessions, group members are encouraged to share their values and

day-to-day feelings, she says. “We also create scenarios and engage in role-playing to help them live the same experiences and feelings as guests and other staff members,” Dionne says.

She notes that while the company prides itself on hiring different personalities, one attribute is core to their success. “We don’t want everyone to be the same. But we need to make sure they have the emotional intelligence to deal with our guests in a way that is in keeping with our values.”

FirstOnSite Restoration is a Toronto-based disaster restoration company with more than 1,100 employees. For CEO Dave Demos, empathy is the No. 1 attribute in recruiting, hiring and training efforts. “We go into situations where a person or business is struck by a disaster. Being empathetic and able to communicate clearly is the most important thing we can do to help. They have to know we care.”

In hiring hundreds of people at all levels, Demos says “the first and foremost thing I consider is how they make you feel when they are sitting

across from you, because that will tell you how they will make the customer feel.”

A great deal of training is focused on the communication process, says Jodi Getson, senior vice-president. “Our people have to understand their customers and evaluate situations, while also realizing how their actions affect others.”

The company also has an employee recognition program that showcases exceptional behaviour, she adds. “It can be something really small, like a carpenter making a cup of tea for a customer. We had one person make bikes for children when their insurance didn’t cover it. These stories become a very cool collection for people joining our team. Through that we have created a circle of motivated people doing great things who are motivating others to do the same. It’s really changing our culture.”