



MONEYWISE

VALUING PEOPLE. VALUING MONEY.

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: EMPATHY IN THE WORKPLACE

Empathy is the ability to understand or share in someone else's feelings. When you are empathetic, you can put the focus on others rather than yourself. In "another person's shoes," you can put away your own thoughts and feelings and focus on how the other person would feel and react. An empathetic person shares in the excitement of another's joys as well as the heartaches of another's challenges. It is a skill that employs both emotional intelligence and social awareness. Empathy helps you understand the thoughts and feelings of others, even when your own emotions differ.

What does this have to do with MONEYWISE? Improving empathy in the workplace can have widespread tangible impacts, both personally and on those around you. In addition to building office relationships, research suggests that expressing empathy at work can lead to better communication between colleagues and more productive meetings. In a society plagued by individualism, being a part of a compassionate, supportive team can improve employee turnover, collaboration, and a sense of purpose in your work.

BECOME AN ACTIVE LISTENER

One way to increase empathy on the job is to improve your listening and observation skills. Research shows that people don't listen as well



as they think they do. When studying average listeners compared to great listeners, researchers found the best listeners engage in two-way dialogue that includes *interactions*. Being quiet while someone else talks and nodding your head is not active listening.

Often, we have a habit of thinking ahead and anticipating what the speaker might say next or how we should respond. Instead, to be an active listener, focus on the person speaking and ask insightful questions. Really listen to what is said and watch for nonverbal cues to help you better understand how someone feels. If a co-worker makes a point you disagree with, be respectful. Don't debate or point out errors. Rather than trying to "win" a conversation, active listeners try to have productive conversations that entertain opposing viewpoints.



EVERYONE APPRECIATES WHEN THEIR TIME AND EFFORT ARE VALUED.



BOOST MEETING PRODUCTIVITY

Another way to show empathy in your workplace is by making meetings more productive. Whether you're the boss or you're chatting with a co-worker about an idea or issue, well-prepared meetings can lead to collaboration and innovation. Coming to a meeting prepared indicates you care about your work, as well as everyone's time. From virtual calls to face-to-face meetings, time is a valuable commodity. Everyone appreciates when their time and effort are valued.

Additionally, you can use empathy skills in meetings to "read" people. This can help you understand and minimize conflicts between colleagues. It can also allow you to recognize if someone is confused, upset, or angered. Developing empathy skills makes it easier to see how people are responding to you, which is important if you're leading the meeting or sharing an idea aloud. Empathy is vital for understanding others, improving communications, and contributing to a positive work environment. Paying more attention to other people's feelings helps you gain perspective.



Research suggests that empathy is contagious. When we show interest in others, that interest is more likely to be returned. Improving listening skills and creating more productive meetings are just two ways empathy can improve your work environment. Be the coworker, employee, or boss you'd like to have.

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