

4 Steps to becoming more Empathetic

Empathy is the act of understanding another person's feelings, thoughts, experiences and communicating that understanding, without judgement

Step 1: Focus

Our brain has the ability to make us only focus on the things it deems to be important. It acts like a filter, in an attempt to simplify our world. If we were to try to be conscious of everything that we see, hear, smell, we would get nothing done! That means that when we are in conversation with someone, we need to tell our brains that this conversation is what is most important at that moment. We need to focus. Close the door. Step away from the computer. Put the phone on silent and put it away.



STEP 1: Focus

“ In a phenomenon called **inattention blindness**, people often miss obvious events in the environment when caught up in an unrelated task. The most famous example of this is The Invisible Gorilla experiment. It proved that we don't notice a lot of what goes on around us, and more importantly, that we have no idea that we are missing so much! ”

“ Remember that party, where you had such an amazing conversation with someone, neither of you even heard the music that was playing loudly? It's what's called the **cocktail party effect**. Here again our brain is magically filtering out unwanted noise so that we can focus on what we want to listen to. ”



STEP 2: Set your intent

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Now that you are focused, you will also need to set your intent which is all about how you listen. We listen in different ways. Sometimes, we are not actually listening, rather we are waiting for moments where we can speak. The second there is a pause, we pounce and say what we wanted to say. Other times, we listen for facts with the intention of seeing what we agree or disagree with. What we want to be doing is listening with the intent to just understand. To see the world through the other person's eyes and not to “fix” anything. This is where empathy starts, so make sure to set your intention to listen at this level.

Step 3: Withhold judgement

It is important that we make a conscious decision to give the person the benefit of the doubt and to understand their motivation. If you notice that you are forming a judgement, as you listen to your employee, ask yourself what the basis of that judgement is. Is it fact or experience? If it's purely experience-based, you have to let it go.



STEP 3: Withhold judgement

“ We tend to assign blame to a person, rather than the situation, when we don't know the person well. But if we do know them well, it's the other way around. That's why it's easier for us to empathize with people who are like us. ”

“ Research done by Salesforce showed that when an employee feels heard, they are **4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to perform to the best of their abilities.** ”



STEP 4: Communicate understanding

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The easiest way to communicate understanding is through paraphrasing. Repeating what someone said, in your own words, and asking them if you are correct in your understanding. This will signal to the other person that you are really engaged in the conversation and want to understand him/her. But in order to be truly empathetic, it's important that you not only acknowledge what happened but also how it made them feel. This is the most important step in closing the empathy “circle”. Acknowledging their emotions will make them feel seen and heard and opens the door to problem solving.