

Empathy

Aaron J. Allen

Minnesota School of Business

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Michelle Rivard

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I'm driving downtown and I come to a stop light at a busy intersection. There I see a man dressed in rags, and looks like he hasn't had a shower in months. This man is holding a piece of cardboard, with writing on it. The cardboard says "Homeless, need money for food." I dare not make eye contact, for fear he will approach my vehicle with an open hand. I have no desire to give him anything. Why should I? I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I moved out at eighteen, and have been on my own ever since. I got to where I am today using only me as a resource. I have a car, a house, a job, and a future. Why couldn't this bum do the same? If I did it, why can't he? The answer is, I don't know. Therefore, I cannot empathize with his situation.

Empathy is not an emotion, but can create emotion. Sympathy is an emotion. Having sympathy for others is simply sharing a feeling of emotion. An example of sympathy would be feeling sorry for someone who had a death in the family. Sympathy is almost like an extension of empathy. My explanation of empathy is somewhat complicated. To empathize is to get a true understanding of the position, predicament, and/or situation that people are faced with. The complicated part is truly understanding their thoughts and feelings associated with their position. If that is achievable, it is then that you can evoke empathy. Having empathy can be a hard task to accomplish. So many people are self-centered or stuck in their own way of thought that they have trouble viewing life through someone else's eyes. Trying to grasp the idea of what others are going through can be challenging. I believe people who have a natural talent for empathy are more than likely to be good listeners, understanding, selfless, and intelligent. As previously mentioned, empathy is not an emotion, but can create emotion. This emotion that is created by empathy is on a personal basis. Empathy is simply an understanding. To empathize with others one needs to try and imagine they are that person, in that current position. In accomplishing that, empathizing is possible. When trying to be empathetic, all personal feelings and opinions need to

be put aside. Strictly focusing all effort in capturing the others situation is key. Empathy does not mean that one needs to agree, or condone the decisions of another. Personally, I find myself in contest with the actions and decisions of others more frequent then not, but I still am empathetic. I understand their position, and I understand how they feel. I can imagine if that was me, how I would feel. Whether I agree, or disagree with each individual scenario is moot. The point is I truly understand their situations and emotions.

In conclusion, empathy can be complicated and a hard concept for some to accomplish. The promising aspect of empathy is that it can be learned. From a communication standpoint, it is a very important tool. Empathizing with the situations of others, especially in a multicultural environment, will increase communication skills, as well as help you gather a better understanding of society in general.