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Be Empathetic Not Sympathetic

By Steve Davis

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Put yourself in the other's shoes, but don't walk their path for them

Isn't Sympathy a Good Thing?

"Oh you poor thing. What happened to you is just terrible! You must feel awful. I wish there was something I could do."

Do these words sound familiar? Maybe you've used them on a friend or relative who suffered a back break, or perhaps you've heard them yourself from a well-meaning friend at a time when something went wrong for you.

Words like these are usually expressed by well-meaning people in the form of "sympathy" to someone they care about. But imagine yourself hearing these words right now. How do they make you feel? Loved, cared for, empowered? Or helpless, victimized, and just plain bad?

Though sympathy is a socially acceptable gesture, I suggest that you stop using it and accepting it from others. It doesn't help you or them. Empathy is a far superior form of expression. Let me explain.

Sympathy or Empathy?

So what's the difference between sympathy and empathy? Sympathy, while highly valued in our culture, can actually be very disempowering. The sympathetic perspective tends to place you above the other, placing you in a position that might sound something like, "Oh you poor thing, this is just terrible what's happening to you." This behavior on your part will actually enable the limited worldview of a person operating from a victim state of mind, and is less likely to help them move to a healthy resolution of their problem.

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On the other hand, coming from an empathetic perspective, you understand what the other is feeling but don't necessarily "go there" with them. Instead, you view them as capable of working through the issue at hand. If you were being empathetic to someone in pain, you might say something like, "I sense that you're hurting right now. Is there anything you need or any support I can offer to help you through this?"

This stance is one of understanding and one that places the responsibility for getting the necessary help in the hands of the person who needs it. Don't rescue! Many people play the victim role so that others can play the rescuer role. Give people the opportunity to find the strength they need and you will both gain.

Practice Empathy

Practice using empathy the next time you're in a situation where someone is suffering emotionally. Assuming this person is an otherwise functional and healthy human being, be present with them in an effort to understand what you might be feeling in a similar situation. Don't try to have their feelings. Instead, trust that they have the inner resources necessary to solve their problems and to get the help they need to move forward. Let them feel their feelings, express their concerns, and shed their tears. Don't try to fix anything for them. Just be with them with your heart open and with an inner and outer certainty that their's is just one perception of their current reality and that they will find strength in your silent witness to their temporary fantasy of limitation.

About the Author:

Steve Davis, M.A., M.S., is an Facilitator's Coach, Infopreneur, and free-lance human, helping facilitators, organizational leaders, educators, trainers, coaches and consultants present themselves confidently, access their creativity, empower their under-performing groups, enhance their facilitation skills, and build their business online and offline. Subscribe to his free weekly ezine at www.MasterFacilitatorJournal.com.

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What do Employees Really Want?

By Megan Tough

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A major problem for business owners and employers today is getting the best employees and then keeping them. Sounds easy, but any employer will tell you that these activities take up the most time and have the biggest impact on business results. So how do you go about retaining the good people

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once you've found them?

Understanding what your employees want from a workplace sounds like a logical place to start. After all, if you know what your employees are after, you simply need to provide it and all will be well. This is a great theory, but research shows that employers are not that successful at identifying what their employees actually want. In fact there is a significant disconnect between the things that employees say are important to them, and how highly employers rank those same things.

This survey first came out in 1946 in Foreman Facts, from the Labor Relations Institute of NY and was produced again by Lawrence Lindahl in Personnel magazine, in 1949. This study has since been replicated with similar results by Ken Kovach (1980); Valerie Wilson, Achievers International (1988); Bob Nelson, Blanchard Training & Development (1991); and Sheryl & Don Grimme, GHR Training Solutions (1997–2001).

When asked to rank a list of ten criteria, the employees and managers/owners ranked them very differently:

WHAT EMPLOYEES SAY THEY WANT (in order)

- 1.Full appreciation for work done
- 2.Feeling `part' of things
- 3.Sympathetic help on personal issues
- 4.Job security
- 5.Good wages
- 6.Interesting work
- 7.Promotion/growth opportunities
- 8.Personal loyalty to workers
- 9.Good working conditions
- 10.Tactful discipline

WHAT MANAGERS THINK EMPLOYEES WANT (in order)

- 1.Good wages
- 2.Job security
- 3.Promotion/growth opportunities
- 4.Good working conditions
- 5.Interesting work
- 6.Personal loyalty to workers
- 7.Tactful discipline
- 8.Full appreciation for work done

- 9.Sympathetic help on personal issues
- 10.Feeling `part' of things

What does this mean if you are an employer or a manager in business today?

Frequent pats on the back will go a long way towards making your employees more satisfied at work.

Happily, it's not always about the money.

Megan Tough, director of Action Plus, works with small business professionals who are ready to do more than 'just get by'. Increase your income – decrease your stress! To learn more and to sign up for more FREE tips and articles like these, visit www.megantough.com

Valentine Day Recipes



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