

Want to be a great leader? Embrace empathy

Interaction Opinion – Brigid Hardy



THE GOOD TO GREAT SERIES

INTERACTION



As a coach, most days I work with leaders seeking the magic ingredient to impactful and effective leadership. While they list the numerous areas where they want to improve, like decisiveness, strategy and managing performance, they are less likely to reflect on the role of empathy in their leadership tool box.

Empathy is a leadership quality that can be transformative. If you aim to lead with impact, then practicing empathy is guaranteed to enhance success.

Here are some of the ways that empathy can increase your leadership impact.

1. Building trust and connection

Empathy is the foundation of trust. To be a good leader, cultivating trust within your team is paramount. When you actively listen to your team members and acknowledge their feelings and perspectives, you create an environment where individuals feel valued. This sense of connection boosts morale and encourages open communication.

2. Encouraging team collaboration

Empathy enhances collaboration. By demonstrating empathy, you set a tone of inclusivity and respect. This encourages your team members to work together and share their diverse viewpoints, leading to a more cohesive and productive team dynamic.

3. Engagement and retention

Retaining talent is crucial for any organisation. When you take time to understand your employees' needs and challenges, you foster a supportive environment that enhances job satisfaction. This not only improves morale but also leads to higher retention rates, reducing turnover and the associated costs.

4. Navigating change and conflict

Change is inevitable, and empathetic leaders are invaluable during these times. Understanding and addressing the emotional responses your team may have - whether it's anxiety about performance or uncertainty

regarding job security, enables you to lead transitions more smoothly. Additionally, empathy allows you to mediate conflict more effectively, finding resolutions that honour all perspectives.

5. Fostering innovation and creativity

If you aspire to lead a team that thrives on innovation, start with empathy. When employees feel supported and understood, they are more likely to take risks and share creative ideas. I encourage my coaching clients to cultivate a culture that celebrates diverse viewpoints. While this can feel counter intuitive to consensus, in reality it creates a more authentic culture that is conducive to respect, problem solving and innovation.

6. Enhancing emotional intelligence

Empathy is a cornerstone of emotional intelligence (EQ), a crucial attribute for effective leadership. By developing your EQ, you can navigate your own emotions while understanding and influencing those of others. This empowers you to make informed decisions that consider the human element.

Tips for building empathy

Active listening: Practice fully engaging with your team members when they speak. Put away distractions, make eye contact, and let them know that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say.

- Ask open-ended questions: Encourage dialogue by asking questions that require more than yes or no answers. This invites deeper conversation and shows you value diverse opinions.
- Reflect and validate: After someone shares their thoughts or feelings, reflect back what you've heard and validate any emotions shared. Show them that their vulnerability is appreciated.
- Put yourself in their shoes: Make a conscious effort to consider situations from your team members' perspectives. This will help you better understand their challenges and motivation.
- Share your own experiences: Be open about your challenges and feelings to create a safe space for others to do the same. Vulnerability strengthens bonds and fosters trust.

- Seek feedback: Regularly ask your team for feedback on your leadership style and approach. This can help you identify areas for improvement and demonstrate your commitment to growth.

If you want to go from being a good to great leader, embracing empathy is essential. By leading with empathy, you create an environment where individuals and teams can truly thrive. The ability to connect with your team on a human level will set you apart as a leader who not only drives results, but also inspires others.

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