

Empathetic Outlook

*A session from
the Rx CD System*

Rx

Empathetic Outlook:

The ability to perceive and understand the feelings and attitudes of others; the ability to place oneself "in the shoes" of another and to view a situation from their perspective.

Why is this skill important?

A person with a good Empathetic Outlook is conscious of how his or her actions impact others, and will utilize this knowledge thoughtfully in a wide variety of scenarios from interacting with others to managing others.

According to the dictionary, Empathy is "understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another person." In other words, Empathy is understanding how someone else feels so intensely that it is as if you are feeling it yourself.

An Empathetic Outlook will enable you to make the most of your interactions with others. If you are attentive and understanding of other peoples' perspectives, you will be much more likely to meet and exceed their expectations by providing the best solutions and presenting them in the most effective manner. In addition, by being open and empathetic, you will be establishing an environment of trust and understanding. You will build a reputation for being attentive and fair in your dealings with other people.

An Empathetic Outlook is linked directly with other interpersonal skills such as personal relationship building, emotional control, and listening. Keeping your sights on establishing and maintaining open, empathetic communication with co-workers, subordinates, and supervisors will help you accomplish your goals and encourage effective teamwork.

In contrast, a person with a low score in the Empathetic Outlook capacity may have difficulty understanding the needs and feelings of others. This may cause him or her to make decisions that do not sufficiently consider the needs of others. For instance, if you are not empathetic, you may not listen carefully to others' comments, you may make insensitive judgments or comments about others, or you may discount the importance of an individual's opinion or feelings on an important issue.

There are two main components to becoming a more empathetic person: listening to others and building relationships with others. Being accepting of one another's profes-

sional and personal motivators enables a team to work together to accomplish organizational goals with the most "buy-in" from team members.

Being empathetic requires you to spend time learning about other people, cultivating your relationships, and serving as an active advocate for others in your organization. Becoming a more empathetic person will not happen overnight. But if you are dedicated to improving how you are perceived by others, in a little time you can make significant changes in your own behavior.

What are skills associated with having an Empathetic Outlook?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with an Empathetic Outlook:

- Demonstrates sensitivity to the feelings of others.
- Has compassion for others—but not at the expense of organizational needs.
- Is conscious of how one's actions directly and indirectly impact others.
- Is able to listen to others with active and accurate listening.
- Values others as human beings.
- Exhibits an active interest in the interests and welfare of others.
- Understands issues relative to gender and cross-cultural ramifications.
- Plugs into the emotional agenda of others.

How do you develop your own Empathetic Outlook?

- Give positive attention to all who deserve it.
- Establish an "open door" policy, and if someone wants to discuss a problem, be prepared to listen without making judgement.
- Take time for informal chats with other people, being sure to express interest in their personal lives.
- Simple courtesy goes a long way. Be sure to say "Please," "You're welcome," and "Thank you."
- Be patient! Allow other people to set the pace of an interaction. If you have important items to share, make sure you do so, but don't push your agenda to the point at which the other person's perspective is ignored.
- Move out from behind your desk when you are talking with someone.
- Listen to people without interrupting, focusing purely on what the speaker is trying to say. Try to put yourself in the speaker's shoes. What is his or her frame of reference for what is being said? Why does she think the way she does on the subject?

- Listen "non-verbally." Maintain eye contact with the speaker. Give signals that you are listening—nods or signs of agreement at appropriate times. Avoid unnecessary distractions, such as ringing cell phones.
- Summarize in your own mind the key points of any discussion.
- Paraphrase information you have just received to confirm you understood it. Briefly restating what someone has just told you shows that you are listening carefully and that you understand what is being said.
- Notice non-verbal communication (clenched fists, smiles, gestures of boredom, defensive postures), and try to guess why the person is sending those messages. Ask what the person is thinking or feeling if the person's non-verbal cues do not match his verbal communication.
- Use open-ended questions when you talk with others, such as, "Tell me about your meeting with Mr. Smith," or "What makes you say that?" Open-ended questions provide opportunities for the person you are talking with to expand on a topic and let the person know you are truly interested in hearing her opinion.
- Allow people to disagree with you. This does not mean you have to change your own position—but allowing someone else to state his point of view (and understanding it) shows your respect for his input.
- Serve as an advocate for the needs, interests, and wants of others, where appropriate.
- If someone comes to you for advice or help in resolving a problem, do what is appropriate and within your power to assist her. If you have observed that a particular group of employees requires special assistance or has requested a new procedure, do your best to suggest reasonable improvements or other changes.
- Use the same criteria for everyone when assigning projects and judging performance. This doesn't mean that everyone is capable of doing exactly the same level of work—better performers have a right to be assigned more challenging projects—but it does mean that you must diligently examine how you make assignments to make sure you are not slighting the lesser performers.
- If you make a work assignment to someone, be clear about your expectations of his performance, and explain your rationale behind making decisions.
- Be sure to make public expression of appreciation for a job well done. Don't forget to praise the individual for good work one-on-one, but public praise goes a long way!

Empathetic Outlook Activities

Activity 1: Investigation

1. Make it a goal to use at least one open-ended question in every conversation you have tomorrow. If you have listened attentively and summarized the speaker's comments in your own mind, this should be easy to do.

2. The next time someone disagrees with something you have said, take it as an opportunity to learn about WHY he disagrees. Ask him, "Why do you feel that way?" or say, "Tell me more about your position on this issue."
3. The next time someone complains to you about a workplace issue, or you observe people having particular difficulties in complying with an unreasonable company or department policy, write the issues down. Then, try to determine at least one action item you can take on each issue to try to help resolve it.

Activity 2: Thanking Other People

Make a list of people in your organization who handled a difficult situation well. Add to that list people you know have been working extra hours or particularly intensely to achieve an important company objective. Then add to the list people who have come to you with concerns, either professional or personal, within the last few weeks.

Once you have completed the list, make a specific effort to give positive attention to those people. Offer to help with a difficult task, compliment someone on a job well done, or treat a hard-working project team to a pizza dinner. Make sure you ask people about their concerns and try to help resolve them if it is appropriate and within your power.

Name 1: _____

Issue: _____

Name 2: _____

Issue: _____

Name 3: _____

Issue: _____

Name 4: _____

Issue: _____

Name 5: _____

Issue: _____

Activity 3: Making a Commitment to Improving Your Empathetic Outlook

Use the following table to begin your plan for improving your empathy skills. Add any additional thoughts you may have for personal improvement in your Empathetic Outlook.

Activity	What Day I Will Start to Practice This
Keep track of how many open-ended questions you ask during a day.	
Move out from behind your desk when you are talking with someone.	
Double the number of times you paraphrase what a speaker has told you.	
Ask someone you trust to count how many times you interrupted her in various conversations.	
Take time for informal chats with other people, being sure to express interest in their personal lives.	
Practice saying "please" and "thank you" when you ask someone to do something for you.	
Allow someone to disagree with you without feeling the need to defend yourself or give in to his point of view.	
Give someone who has particularly helped you a public "thank you."	
Other:	
Other:	
Other:	

Activity 4: Imagining How Others Feel

Think about recent interactions you have had with people at work or at home as you answer the following questions:

1. Can you think of a time recently that someone "overreacted" with anger to something that you or someone else said or did? Write down several reasons why the person may have reacted so strongly. Were there things bothering him or her? Was he or she having personal problems? Was he or she overworked or stressed?
2. Can you think of a time recently that someone seemed vague or distant, uninterested in what was going on? Write down several reasons why the person may have seemed to have lost interest so noticeably. Were there things bothering him or her? Was he or she having personal problems? Was he or she overworked or stressed?
3. Can you think of a time recently when someone seemed suddenly happy or joyful? What do you think caused the happiness? Write down several potential reasons why he or she was so happy. What kinds of positive things might have happened to him or her?