

LEADING WITH EMPATHY

The New Competitive Advantage

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START WITH CURIOSITY

“Empathy is too often reduced to ‘being nice’ or ‘listening more.’ In reality, empathy starts with something simpler: curiosity.”

From How to Work with Complicated People by Ryan Leak: *“How you see them is how you treat them.”*

WHY EMPATHY PAYS OFF

Organizations with empathic leadership and team cultures experience measurable gains:

- Reduced turnover and related costs
 - Higher retention rates and improved productivity
 - Helps people navigate work and life demands
 - Greater job fulfillment and team engagement
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EMPATHY AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Effective	Efficient
Culture of Kindness Fosters Happy Teams. <i>Customers value employees who are cared for.</i>	Authentic Empathy Builds Trust. <i>Trust enhances efficiency in work.</i>

People: The True Asset - Empowered employees drive business success creating community impact.

Empathy is a year-round commitment – not seasonal.

WORKPLACE EMPATHY *REALITY*[™] CHECK

Before You Lead Others: *Notice what you're carrying before you lead others.*

R - RECOGNIZE what emotional or cognitive load you're carrying (stress, frustration, distraction)

E - ENGAGE and acknowledge it without judgment so you don't transfer it to others

A - ASK what you need to be present, grounded, and fair today (clarity, boundaries, support)

L - LISTEN and respond to those needs before leading others

In Group Meetings – *“Whose voice, energy, or clarity do we need to make space for right now?”*

- Pause before starting — notice the feel of the room and people's energy
- Start with an emotional check-in: "On a scale of 'I'm good' to 'I'm a human dumpster fire,' where are you today?"
- Be present — your presence matters more than perfect words

In One-on-One Meetings

- Ask curiosity questions, not just performance questions
- "What feels heavy today?" | "What's one thing I can help clarify?" | “What’s getting in the way?” | "What would make this easier?"
- Listen to truly understand before jumping to solutions

In Delegation – *“I see how you work. Let’s build around that.”*

- Recognize emotional or task-fit signals (overwhelm, confusion, hesitation)
 - Engage to shape the task together — not correcting, aligning
 - Ask what clarity, structure, or support enables success for them
 - Adjust expectations based on how they uniquely work best
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YOUR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE THIS WEEK

- Set up a one-on-one conversation this week.
 - Lean into your curiosity and practice these tips.
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For more information or to continue this conversation, reach out to any of the presenters. Contact Michelle Holt for more information on the REALity Check[™].

REALity Check™ Tools for Workplace Empathy

Empathy at work doesn't show up as a big dramatic moment. It shows up as noticing. As pausing. Taking three extra seconds to actually see someone.

REALity Check™ for You

Empathy begins with noticing what you're carrying before you lead others.

R - RECOGNIZE

Notice what emotional or cognitive load you're carrying. (Stress, frustration, distraction, urgency)

E - ENGAGE

Acknowledge it without judgment so you don't transfer it. (Name it so it doesn't leak onto others)

A - ASK

What do you need to be present, grounded, and fair today? (Clarity, boundaries, permission to slow down, support)

L - LISTEN

Respond to those needs intentionally before leading others. (Pause, reset, choose your tone)

Takeaway: *Before entering a meeting remind yourself: "This meeting deserves the best version of me right now."*

REALity Check™ for Meetings

Empathy asks, "Whose voice, energy, or clarity do we need to make space for right now?"

R - RECOGNIZE

Pause before starting to notice the feel of the room. What do you see, feel, or sense? Unusual quiet. Signs of overwhelm. Nervous energy. Body language.

E - ENGAGE

Lean in gently. Be in the moment. Be present. You don't need the perfect words, just your presence.

A - ASK

Groups - Start with a group emotional check-in like: "On a scale of: 'I'm good,' 'I'm managing,' 'I'm running on hopes and caffeine,' 'I'm a human dumpster fire' — where are you today?"

1:1's - Use curiosity questions instead of performance questions, like: "What feels heavy today?"

"What's one thing I can help clarify?", "What's getting in the way?", "What would make this easier?"

L - LISTEN

Truly listen, without jumping right to a fix. Let them feel that they have been seen, heard, and understood.

Takeaway: *People speak differently when they feel seen first.*



REALity Check™ for Delegation

Empathy says, “I see how you work. Let’s build around that.”

R - RECOGNIZE

Notice emotional or task-fit signals. How is this assignment emotionally landing? Overwhelming, unclear, hesitation, or high-pressure?

E - ENGAGE

Create space to shape the task/structure together before handing them off.

A - ASK

Identify what clarity, structure, or support enables success.

- “What clarity or structure would help you succeed?”
- “What does ‘done’ look like to you?”
- “What feels unclear or heavy?”
- “How do you work best?”

L - LISTEN

Adjust expectations based on how they uniquely work. Validate their needs and shape the assignment accordingly. What they need is often underneath what they say:

- starting point
- confirmation of expectations
- reassurance that good enough is safe
- manageable pacing
- clear deliverables

REAL in Real-Life - Same assignment. Different wiring.

Employee A: Needs flexibility, quick wins, supportive structure

You: Clarify steps, create traction points, check alignment early

Employee B: Needs clarity, parameters, and assurance of expectations

You: Define success criteria so they don’t overbuild, overwork, over stress

Takeaway: Delegation isn’t dumping tasks. Delegation is development.
And development works best when it aligns with how someone uniquely works.

Personal Connection. Infinite Growth.

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