



The Missing Link to Improving Workplace Culture

How Empathy Influences Productivity,
Retention and Belonging

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A Paradigm Shift Is Needed

Imagine what could be achieved working in a place where the employees 1) feel engaged; 2) are willing to work longer hours; 3) less likely to leave, and even 4) be willing to work for less pay. What would that be worth to the organization?

How does that compare to an organization where the employees don't feel supported? Where they aren't being listened to and work feels like a chore? What might that be costing the company in business results?

The difference between the two is the relationship that they have fostered between managers and leaders and employees. At the heart of that relationship is not extra perks, it's about communication. Empathetic communication.

Employers that foster an empathetic workplace benefit from that effort, according to several leading studies. Over 80% of CEOs recognize that a workplace culture empowered by empathy is linked to financial results. One study found that 67% of employees will work longer hours for an empathetic employer. Another uncovered that 86% of employees can balance work and home more successfully when their manager is empathetic.

And yet, being empathetic is challenging due to the "old tapes" and stereotypical misconceptions of empathy, what it means to be empathetic and how men and women are supposed to show up at work.

And *this is the paradigm that needs to change*. If CEOs recognize the importance of empathy to financial results, and more than half recognize they play a role in building an empathetic culture, why are nearly 2/3 uncomfortable with displaying empathy themselves?

It's time to eject the old tapes and create new. Diminish the fear and confusion that exist around what it means to be empathetic as a manager and a leader. Including more than 2/3 who are concerned about being viewed as weak if they display empathy.

See empathy as the superpower that we are born with rather than a flaw to be ignored, and you'll be able to harness its power to create a stronger workplace which will yield the results you seek.



Empathy is a Feature, Not a Flaw

To understand how to use something, it's important to understand what it is and what it isn't.

Empathy is a feature that humans are born with. There are different types of empathy; notably, cognitive and emotional empathy. Cognitive empathy is seeing the perspective of someone else, as them, while emotional empathy is feeling the feelings of someone else as them.

Cognitive empathy is used in many of our day-to-day situations where we have to communicate and collaborate with others. We may not have the shared experiences or emotional availability to reach emotional empathy, but understanding where someone is coming from is powerful on its own and can be more readily attained.



Cognitive

Perspective taking –
I can see your point of view



Emotional

Feeling the emotions
as another is feeling them

Empathy in Action

The EmpathES™ is the ecosystem that embraces empathy to create a healthy company. From values to leadership behavior; communication to processes and the experience of customers and community, each of these facets is intertwined. If one wobbles, the entire organization struggles.

In practical terms, it can look like taking the time to support individuals as employees as well as a whole person. Companies that truly succeed infuse empathy into their mission and values, expect behaviors from those that inspire and guide to be empathetic in nature. HR policies and the way people talk to each other are vital to this ecosystem. The way the customer experiences the organization should be infused with empathy as well to keep the relationship strong and the customer returning. Companies that achieve this balance enjoy the ROI of empathy.

Taking the First Step Toward Building Empathetic Understanding

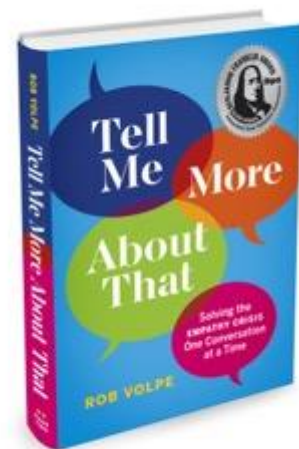
In my work doing marketing research, I've uncovered the common barriers people face when trying to get to a place of empathy. This is important because if you can't get to understanding, you won't be able to do anything about it and that's like a large brand leaving \$500M on the table.

The 5 Steps to Empathy™ are presented in a linear fashion but people experience them all differently based on their own life experience and the context of the moment.



1. Dismantle Judgment
2. Ask Good Questions
3. Actively Listen
4. Integrate into Understanding
5. Use Solution Imagination

My book, *Tell Me More About That: Solving the Empathy Crisis One Conversation at a Time* goes into detail on each of the steps and features stories from my personal and professional experiences trying to achieve empathy with respondents in market research studies I was conducting. As leadership coach Dov Baron once observed, “the 5 Steps seem simple, but they aren't easy.”



Remove the Noise-Cancelling Headphones

Step 1: Dismantle Judgment – this is the hardest one for people to overcome. This is about our negative thoughts and actions toward others. It's incongruous to establishing empathy in order to understand.

Step 2: Ask Good Questions – we think we are asking good questions but often we are putting words in people's mouths to affirm our own point of view or put people on the defensive instead of unlocking new perspective.

Step 3: Actively Listen – we believe we are paying attention, but we are often distracted by tech, notifications and to-do lists. Giving our full attention delivers clear understanding.

Step 4: Integrate into Understanding – realize that there are different ways of doing things and viewing the world and be ok with that. Stay open, curious and courteous.

Step 5: Use Solution Imagination – take what you have heard and use it to inform the next question and move the conversation forward.



“You have to take off your own shoes before you put on someone else’s” – Steve Case, CEO, Intuit

It's Time to Shift the Paradigm

Evaluate the 'old tapes' you might be playing and how you show up for colleagues. Hit the 'eject' button and start new practices like following the Empathy Formula so employees feel seen and heard. Reframe conversations to remove the word 'why' and ask “tell me more about that”. Then, repeat the POV of others and ask for verification that you are understanding them correctly. When you identify with your employees, they will identify with you which results in greater dedication and business success. Let's get to work!

About Rob Volpe

Rob Volpe is the Founder/CEO of Empathy Activist. He is a recognized thought leader and speaker in the improvement of communication and collaboration in organizations of all sizes in all industries. An award-winning author, Rob creates customized training, coaching and consulting programs that can help drive results in your organization through the strategic use of empathy.

Email Rob at rob@robvolpe.expert to schedule a free 20-minute consultation.

Also sign-up for Reading Between the Lines, Rob's bi-monthly newsletter with news, thought-pieces including tips on using empathy in real life, early access to new material, appearances and training.

Visit Rob's website www.robvolpe.expert for more information.