EMPATHY – AN INDISPENSABLE LEADERSHIP TRAIT

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In today's fast-paced world, leadership is often associated with qualities like decisiveness, vision, and charisma. While these traits are undeniably important, there's one quality that stands out as a cornerstone of great leadership: empathy. Empathy, often described as the ability to understand and share the feeling of others, goes beyond sympathy or mere kindness, is often overlooked in leadership discussions, but it's a trait that can make or break a leader's effectiveness.

So, why is empathy so crucial for leaders? Let's explore a few key reasons:

1. Building Trust and Rapport: Empathy is the foundation of trust. When leaders demonstrate empathy, they create an environment where people feel valued, heard, and understood. This fosters strong relationships, enhances teamwork, and encourages open communication.

2. Enhancing Collaboration and Innovation: Empathetic leaders recognize and appreciate the diverse perspectives and experiences of their team members. By actively listening and seeking to understand different viewpoints, they encourage collaboration and create space for innovation.

3. Empowering and Developing Others: Effective leaders understand that their success lies in the success of their team. By practicing empathy, they empower and uplift their people.

4. Strengthening Employee Engagement and Retention: Empathetic leaders create a positive work environment that values the well-being and fulfillment of their employees.

Once we agree empathy is not just a soft; it is an absolute necessity for fostering engagement, productivity, and success in any organization, in today's dynamic world. Below are some ways to imbibe empathy in leadership:

1.   Attend To Basic Needs First

Empathy in the hierarchy of human experiences is a higher order emotion. In order to develop empathy, you must have your survival needs met first. People are inherently driven toward needing to know they are okay and that they fit in. A company environment, where they know they are okay and fit in, allows them to work on listening. Listening to others is the key to developing empathy.

2.   Practice Emotional Intelligence; Show Vulnerability

Showing vulnerability develops empathy for people, and companies are no different. Companies need to own up to their challenges and problems in a way that demonstrates that they are really trying.

3.   Learn Continually

We need to be open to learning at all levels in an organization. Companies can do a better job supporting their leaders in developing empathy by creating a learning culture that breaks down stigmas that leaders must know everything. There's a great quality and humility in a leader who is willing to accept that there's room to grow.

4.   Recognize Perspectives

One of the key things to discuss in situations like this is the notion of perspectives. Sometimes leaders get so caught up in believing their perspective is reality that they forget the circumstances people find themselves in.

5.   Unplug And Be Present

Focusing on others and demonstrating empathy is very challenging for many leaders. It becomes even more challenging with someone who is tethered to technology or multitasking. When meeting with teammates, putting down your phone and giving them your undivided attention will help you understand and connect with them in a more powerful way.

6.   Ask Open ended questions and Listen

Cultivate the habit of getting out of the office and off of email. Talk to people at the front lines and in middle management, and spend more time listening rather than talking. Ask open-ended questions: "What's working and what's not?" or "What is one thing that would make your work more effective or enjoyable?" Then listen in order to understand, rather than listening to craft a reply.

7.   Ask, Reflect And Communicate

Empathy isn't about taking on the emotions and perspectives of others but more about understanding and considering them. Develop empathy in leaders by exposing them to all areas of the business, team and customer experience. Help them understand the personal and business challenges, and practice reflecting that understanding in town hall, group and one-on-one meetings. Also, show empathy for your leaders.

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