

**Office DEPOT**  
Global Learning



Optimizing  
Leadership  
Potential

VOLUME

1

T.E.A.M. Model Resource Guide

**T.E.A.M.**


**MODEL RESOURCE GUIDE**

Builds Mutual **T**rust & Respect  
Demonstrates Accountability for **E**xecuting Results  
**A**ligns Direction  
Displays Emotional **M**aturity

**TEAM GUIDE**

T.E.A.M. MODEL RESOURCE GUIDE  
1. BUILDS MUTUAL TRUST & RESPECT

ICON KEY

 Valuable Information

 What It Looks Like

 Further Exercises

 Further Reading

# Empathy

*Sensing others' feelings and taking an active interest in their concerns.*

**H**ave you ever heard that great leaders are great listeners? It's true. You cannot provide great leadership unless you listen and understand the needs of the people you are leading.

**Empathy is different from sympathy.** Sympathy means actually feeling what the other person is feeling – sad, joyful, nervous. Empathy goes a step further. Empathy means that you can relate to what the other person is feeling and that you can understand his or her message. An empathetic leader maintains perspective and objectivity in relationships with others – a critical leadership skill.

## Empathy is Listening

There are bosses who listen and bosses who are more apt to cut people off in mid-sentence. Impatient behaviors come across to others as a lack of empathy – a general lack of caring for the individual. With “Respect for the Individual” as one of our core values, Office Depot aims to make each of its worldwide employees feel valued, respected and listened to.

## Listen First, Solve Second

As a leader, you might have the best of intentions to want to solve a problem quickly. However, really listening means not interrupting someone. Don't suggest words if they hesitate or pause. Even saying “Yes, I know that” can discourage someone from telling the full story. To truly listen, your mouth is closed, your eye contact is good and you're not fidgeting. Taking notes is helpful for keeping track of a complex issue and for doing something active without talking over the other person's story.

*“The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy.”*  
— Meryl Streep

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**1. BUILDS MUTUAL TRUST & RESPECT**

## **Inquiry**

Another element of good listening is inquiry. Think of an effective job interview, where the interviewee is asking pertinent questions about the position to show his or her interest. If you already ask questions, just asking one or two additional questions beyond what would be your routine is a good practice to heighten your listening skills. The following steps can help you to get beyond the surface of an issue and find out more.

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 Valuable Information

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- Bracket (Set aside your own arguments for a moment to really listen to the speaker's point of view)
- Reflect (Confirm understanding by repeating the speaker's exact words)
- Paraphrase (Rephrase using your own words to confirm meaning)
- Perception Check (Ask further questions to understand how the speaker feels about the issue)
- Probe further into the issue
- Use body language (Increase the comfort level of the speaker by using body language that matches your words)

*Selective hearing vs.  
really listening*

### **“What was that, dear?”**

Picture a couple sitting on a couch in their living room.

“Did I tell you that I called the mortgage broker today and he said that we could refinance, but we need to get the house re-appraised and that will cost about \$400.00, but I think that we should probably go for it. What do you think, Henry? Henry? Henry, your pants are on fire. Henry, what's the score?”

“Twelve to seven, Pittsburgh,” says Henry, as he watches Monday Night Football and is only half-listening. His wife is not too pleased with his selective hearing. In this case, Henry might feel all too familiar with the speaker (his wife), but his selective hearing is not helping their relationship.

Even if you think you're usually a good listener, we're all guilty of “selective hearing” at times. Think about the following questions...

- Who do you listen to?
- Who do you NOT listen to?
- What factors get in the way of your REALLY listening? Difference in job title or level at work? Gender? Familiarity with the speaker? Setting? Situation? Difference in level of education?



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### 1. BUILDS MUTUAL TRUST & RESPECT

These can be painful issues to address, but they must be addressed if you want to value every member of your team. It can take years to correct sexist, racist or classist behaviors. You may unwittingly discriminate for unusual reasons, i.e. being partial to neat people, tall people or attractive people. But challenge yourself to practice listening to others who you might not usually listen to. Separate the content from the person. Be open-minded to new ideas.

### Caring About What Others Think

Show that you care about what other people are thinking. Ask questions of your direct reports. Asking for advice is a great way to include and involve someone in a decision. It also demonstrates that you value his or her opinion. More asking and less “stating” is what encourages people to talk. Ask “what if,” “what would you change,” and “what are you learning” questions.

### Empathy is Knowing

Try to find out or listen for non-work things about everyone you work with. Know at least 3 non-work related things about each person. Chatting about interests, hobbies, or family is a way of getting to know someone beyond their working relationship to you. Think of this type of conversation as the glue that can bond relationships at work and even smooth over some of the rough spots when work-related problems arise.

**John, one of my direct reports...**

1. Plays the drums in a reggae band
2. Has two cats
3. Plays ice hockey

*What's the opposite  
of showing empathy?*

Can you picture anyone who is NOT empathetic at all? Part of understanding empathy is understanding what the opposite of empathy would look like. Have you ever met someone who does not listen or relate to others? Picture those behaviors in a work setting. Of course, non-empathetic behaviors would cause a group of direct reports to lose motivation and respect for the manager, either immediately or over time.

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#### **People who do not demonstrate empathy:**

Stereotype others. (They see others primarily in terms of ethnic or other stereotypes.)

Show no understanding. (They misunderstand or are surprised by others' feelings or actions.)

Show little understanding. (They show no explicit awareness of others.)

Come into conflict frequently. (They clash with others, and do not understand their concerns or thoughts.)

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 What It Looks Like

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### **Empathy in Action**

Now picture someone who truly listens to you, understands you and shows empathy.

#### **People who demonstrate empathy:**

Show the ability to understand other people.

Accurately hear and understand unspoken or partly expressed thoughts, feelings and concerns of others.

Take an active interest in other people's concerns. (This is not the same as an intrusive behavior, but is more of a caring behavior.)

Demonstrate a cross-cultural sensitivity and show respect for each individual.

### **On-The-Job Developmental Exercises**

#### **Tips for Development**

Keep a log of situations in which you feel you demonstrated empathy at the targeted levels, and situations in which you did not. Pay particular attention to critical incidents that provided opportunities for you to:

- Identify underlying concerns that are not explicitly stated by others
- Hear the emotions that accompany an expressed statement
- Set a regular interval (i.e. 1x per week), when you will review at the end of a day whether you were engaged appropriately at any level of empathy

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 Further Exercises

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Track what happens in terms of the competency behaviors:

- Did you listen when someone approached you to express feelings? Or did you feel too busy to talk about such things and brush the person off?
- Did you practice using open-ended probes, such as “Tell me more about that,” to make sure you understood the other person’s point of view fully, as to both emotion and content?
- Did you adjust your style and approach based on the needs and style of the person you were working with, as shown in body language (gestures, etc.), para-language (tone, pitch, speed, volume); dress (e.g., formality) and environment (use of space)?
- Did you understand underlying motivations for others’ behavior (recognize they come from different backgrounds, have different values and beliefs) and adjust your response accordingly?
- If you do not show empathy very often, you may want to set goals for improving your performance after thinking through what the personal obstacles to showing it may be. For example, sometimes people become so task-oriented that taking time to listen to others’ problems may seem irrelevant, at best, or a distraction from getting important things done, at worst. A second daily check of the frequency with which you display various kinds of empathy six months later will indicate whether you have improved in this competency area.

## Expanding Your Horizons

Courses that help people develop listening skills and people skills exist at most institutions of higher learning.

On your own you can work systematically through a number of assessment devices that can be used to improve your skill. Some of these involve listening to taped dialogues in which you are asked to try to respond appropriately either at the moment or afterwards.

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 Further Reading

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## Further Reading Material

You can turn to a number of valuable resources on the subject of empathy. Carl Rogers remains the best single source of information on how to listen and respond appropriately. He developed a form of nondirective therapy based entirely on this competency. His books provide both the theoretical basis for the approach and many examples of how it works out in practice.

## T.E.A.M. MODEL RESOURCE GUIDE

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- *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice Implications and Theory*, C.R. Rogers, Houghton Mifflin, 1951.
- *Empowered by Empathy: 25 Ways to Fly in Spirit*. Rose Rosetree, Women's Intuition Worldwide, 2000.
- *On the Problem of Empathy (Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, discaLced Carmelite, Vol 3)*. Edith Stein, Ics Pubns, 1989.
- *The Art of Talking so that People Will Listen: Getting Through to Family, Friends, and Associates*, P. W. Swets, Prentice Hall, 1983.
- *Why Didn't You Say That in the First Place? How to Be Understood at Work*, R. Heyman, Jossey-Bass, 1994. (This book gives information on how to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings; also discusses how to make sense of what other people say.)



### **A Final Note: Empathy**

In your daily experience at Office Depot, you can make a special effort to treat others with empathy. Being empathetic means showing openness, consideration, and a sensitivity to working relationships. Empathy is sensing how others are feeling.