

Wroten & Associates

October 2013 Leadership Insight

People Skills: Empathy in the Workplace

"Learning is a result of listening, which in turn leads to even better listening and attentiveness to the other person. In other words, to learn from the child, we must have empathy, and empathy grows as we learn." ---Alice Miller

Learning how to really connect with someone requires good people skills, and empathy is the most important element in connecting with others. Many of us know people who have excelled in their career because of their excellent technical skills, but somehow have difficulty getting along with their team members because their people skills are not developed. These skills may not be developed due to their being judgmental, projecting an insensitive manner to co-workers, and exhibiting poor listening skills. Workers with poor people skills will often find themselves in the middle of many conflicts and will have difficulty in gaining the cooperation and agreement of their co-workers necessary for progress within an organization.

An excellent start in learning "good" people skills is by developing the ability to empathize with others. As you probably know, empathy is acknowledging the emotions in others, understanding their perspective and the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes. Using empathy effectively requires you to put aside your viewpoints. Remember, most people are just reacting to a situation with the knowledge they have and they are not necessarily being stubborn or unreasonable. Validating the other person's perspective is another way to show empathy. This does not mean you are in agreement, but you can acknowledge that people have different opinions from yours. Be sure to listen to the entire message the person is trying to communicate, and be aware of what is happening. Awareness of your attitude is also important. Make sure you are not more concerned with being right or winning. With an open mind and positive attitude you will be able to show plenty of empathy. In practicing these skills when you interact with other people you will appear to be more caring and approachable.

Remember, developing an empathic approach may be the most significant effort you can make toward improving your people skills. When you understand others they will want to understand you which will help to begin to build cooperation, collaboration and teamwork.

Wishing you an empathic and inspired month!

Positively provided to you by:

Wroten & Associates and Marilyn W. Allemann, LCSW, CPC