

Positive Leadership Toolkit

An overview of Chapter 6: Empathy

Pillar 6 – Empathy

Increased attention is being paid to empathy and its role in leadership effectiveness. Researchers have identified three dimensions of empathy that work together to build deep connections and drive organizational success. There are three types of empathy:

- 1. Cognitive empathy:** the ability to understand another perspective on an intellectual level – the “thinking side” of empathy
- 2. Emotional empathy:** the ability to feel and share others’ emotions and a genuine emotional connection – this can lead to feeling understood
- 3. Compassionate empathy:** the ability to turn understanding and feeling into tangible action – this is when empathic concern acts on insights

“The why”: Evidence of the importance of empathy

The benefits of empathetic leadership include:

- Increased personal effectiveness (leadership excellence)
- Higher levels of employee engagement
- Higher levels of innovation
- Inclusion and belonging
- Resilience and well-being

“The how”: Practical strategies to enhance empathy

- **Seek out other perspectives**
 - Rather than treating people the way we would want to be treated, we must treat people the way they wish to be treated
- **Ask questions**
 - Use open-ended “what,” “how,” or “why” questions to invite expansive thinking
 - Leverage follow-up questions: “Can you tell me more?” or “Why do you think that happened?”
 - Explore the unknown: make it a habit to ask questions like “What are we missing?” and “What assumptions are we making?”

- Conduct question bursts for brainstorming when you're stuck on a tough problem (use questions instead of solutions to reframe a problem in a new way)
- Encourage a questioning culture: by resisting the impulse to act defensively when questions are asked or challenges are posed, leaders show teams that questions are valued
- Be proactive about fostering questions: try asking "What is a topic that we have not discussed but should?"
- **Engage in active listening**
 - Use a framework like AMPP – Ask, Mirror, Paraphrase, and Prime
- **Offer training and development**
 - Invest in leadership training for yourself and your team that emphasizes emotional intelligence and empathy skills, reinforcing that empathy is something that can be learned and practiced

To learn more about the benefits of empathy and practical strategies to apply it, read **Chapter 6: Empathy**, written by Dr. Craig Dowden, in full in [APEX's Positive Leadership Toolkit](#).