

4 Ways to Practice Empathy in the Workplace

with Rob Volpe, CEO of Ignite 360s



- Get over the judgment.
 - This is easier said than done because many times we don't even realize we are judging. Our judgments are based on many ingrained beliefs and values based on how we were raised, the environments in which we live and other influencers like religion, government, and education.
 - When judgment rules, the aura becomes one of leveling - who is better than whom. That's when ego rears its ugly head. Or, on the other side of the coin, inferiority complex.
 - How do we become aware of something we currently have no awareness of? Whenever you are tempted to quickly dismiss a person, their POV, or feedback, ask yourself "why"? Then acknowledge the response without judgment.
 - This happens most in meetings. These are the judgment capitals. We regularly rate everyone's feedback/POV based on their experience, expertise, role.
 - We have to stop the narrative in our heads. When we are listening to someone/watching behavior our inner monologue starts and sometimes we aren't even aware of it. This is where the judgment can happen even passively.
- Understand and appreciate other people's motivators.
 - When teams aren't performing at their highest potential, this is usually a key reason why. We've talked about how you need to set goals bigger than what any one member can do on their own. The reason why is because it forces people to acknowledge and respect that others are responsible for their success. And by the way, these big goals usually result in bigger business impact.
 - When each person only focuses on their own piece of the pie, we can only accomplish what we can do individually. The issue is, we can't achieve our goals and dreams without the help of other humans. So, we must understand how we can create mutually beneficial outcomes in order for EVERYONE to succeed.
 - The key to doing this is understanding how others are motivated. For example, if I am in sales and I get rewarded based on how many deals I close, I likely need my marketing folks to develop compelling materials that I can use with my customers. On the flip side, if I am a marketer and am rewarded based on the effectiveness of my marketing materials, I should be creating ones that return on KPI's that are of value to the business, one of which is likely to support my sales team. But what can happen is a lot of tension between these functions because the marketing team is focused on campaigns that don't help the sales team sell and the marketing team is frustrated because the sales team creates their own materials versus using the ones they create.
 - Coincidentally, this is a big factor for high achievers trying to move up but feel held back by their boss. We usually unlock this by asking...what do you think motivates your boss? Number one answer is "looking good". So, make them look good. You get the recognition and support you want and so does the boss. Win-win.
 - It can be really hard to put yourself in the other person's shoes, let alone their minds, which is where their motivations live. It takes work to unpack these things. So if you are going to make your boss look good for example what does that mean to them? Take the time to observe and gather insights into what makes them tick. And then do things that serve that motivation.
- Seek to find common ground.
 - This is an extension of the point above, but it directly addresses some common myths regarding empathy. Like that you have to concede your POV or give in. Or that being empathetic means letting people walk all over you. It is about realizing that other people's POV's are as important to them as yours is to you. So, therefore, the best path to success is to work for common ground versus a win/lose scenario.
 - Rarely will everyone feel like it's a Win-Win in any outcome. But you can seek a place of common understanding, respect, alignment where everyone feels compelled to get in the boat and row. This comes from acknowledging two key truths:
 - People generally have good intentions.
 - People are generally coming from a good place.
 - That doesn't mean that what they do is always what is best, but we can believe that their intentions are good in their pursuits and the perspective/POV/feedback is coming from a good place, we are more apt to engage and work towards finding common ground versus disengaging and getting defensive.
 - This is a lot of give and take here in the negotiation. Sometimes, you give a little more, sometimes you get a little more. This also takes time and patience and we get push back that "I don't have time for that" - I am on deadline, etc. The time is worth its weight in gold when you get here, though, because it makes future negotiations and situations easier because you have gotten to this place and don't have to rework it each time.
- Ask good questions.
 - The other side of this coin is "don't assume". The crux of this is when you are curious, you are seeking to understand. When you seek to understand, you learn something about people, and when you learn something, you can appreciate them more.
 - There is an art to asking good questions so it doesn't move into feelings of interrogation, judgment, or agenda-based "leading the witness".
 - People like to talk about themselves. Let them. And then LISTEN. Really listen to what they are saying vs. crafting the response narrative in your head.