



Empathic Leadership in Libraries

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Megan (Buck) Rose
meg@dcl-lib.org



Today's Highlights

What is Empathy?

Building Empathy

Empathy in Library Leadership:
Why we need it

Empathy in Library Leadership:
Issues when we get it wrong

Next Steps

Definition from Merriam-Webster:

empathy

noun

em·pa·thy 'em-pə-thē

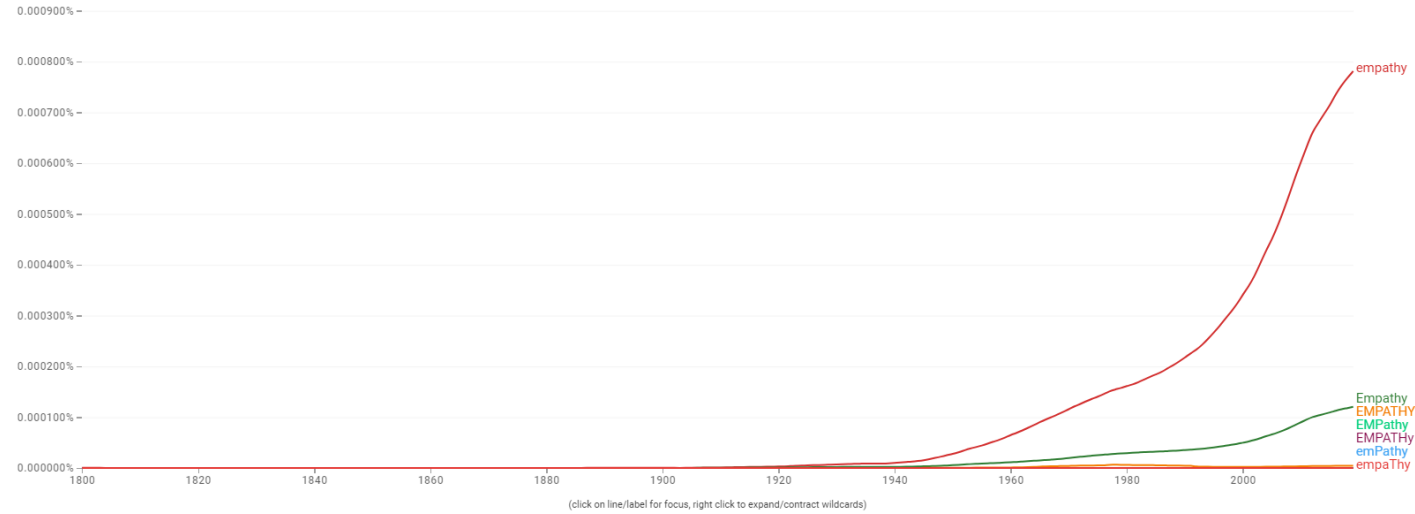
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: the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another
also : the capacity for this



empathy

1800 - 2019 English (2019) Case-Insensitive Smoothing of 7



Antonyms

VINDICTIVENESS, REVENGE,
VENGEANCE, RETALIATION,
PUNISHMENT, CRUELTY, SADISM

Empathy vs Sympathy

Empathy

- Comes from your heart
- Connects you to the person they feel heard and shared experiences
- Shows understanding
- Shows acceptance, nonjudgment
- Appropriate anytime
- Can be shown to anyone regardless of closeness and requires vulnerability

Sympathy

- Comes from your ego
- Separates you from the person struggling
- Relief of not having the same problem
- Often leads to advice/pity
- Appropriate for difficult/tough situations
- More appropriate for those you are not close to as it keeps social distance and does not require vulnerability

Empathy vs Compassion

Empathy

- Feeling-based
- Experiencing of someone else's feelings with understanding
- Can create a negative or overwhelming emotion
- Can cause withdrawal from someone
- Can cause burnout

Compassion

- Action-based
- Moved to help someone, does not required understanding
- Can create a positive emotion from helping actions
- Prosocial vs antisocial behavior for those in need
- Can cause compassion fatigue

Types of Empathy

- Cognitive Empathy
- Affective/Emotional Empathy
- Compassionate Empathy

Cognitive Empathy

Intellectual understanding

Consider someone's situation without having experienced it yourself

Understanding someone's behavior as caused by their situation

Example – a friend loses their job, and you understand their decision to cancel a planned trip due to feeling a fear of the cost, even if you are not experiencing the distress of the loss of income yourself



Affective/Emotional Empathy

Physical understanding

Feeling someone's emotions as if you are experiencing them yourself

Can include physical responses to emotions

Example – a friend loses their job and cancels a planned trip due to feeling a fear of the cost, you feel a tightness in your chest or pain in your stomach when they tell you as if you are also fearful of a loss of income



Compassionate Empathy

AKA – Empathetic Concern

Combination of Cognitive and Affective Empathy

Example – a friend loses their job and cancels a planned trip due to feeling a fear of the cost, you understand their decision and feel a tightness in your chest or pain in your stomach – having the combined cognitive and emotional response can lead you to consider offering to help, especially if the trip was going to be a shared experience





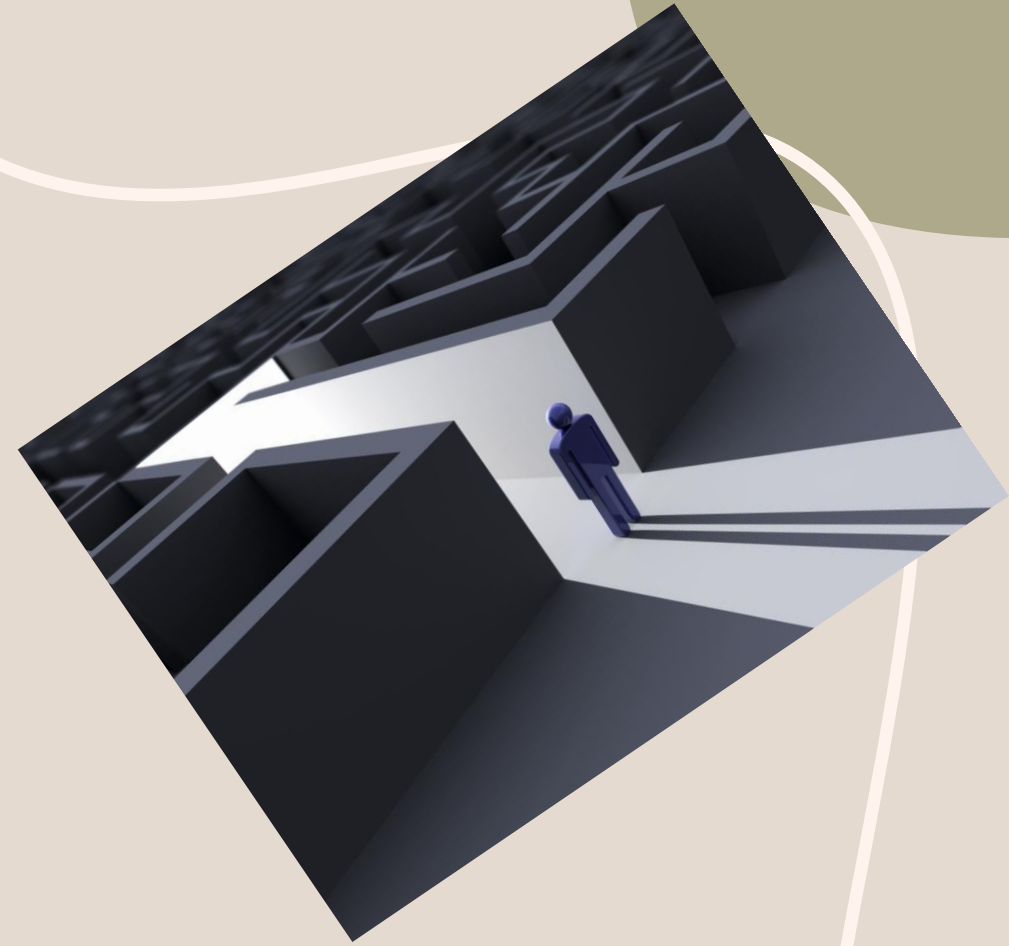
Empathy is a spectrum

1. It is possible to have a lack of or low empathy
2. Sometimes, trauma or illness can cause people to have low empathy and/or difficulty developing empathy.
3. Empathy is a skill that most everyone has the capacity to develop.
4. Some personality, developmental, or neurological disorders influence empathy.
5. Lack of exposure to empathy or too much time alone can lead to low empathy.
6. High levels of stress or burnout can lead to avoiding additional distress and a low level of empathy.

Absent Empathy?

Signs of a Lack of Empathy or Low Empathy:

- Being judgmental.
- Believing something “can’t happen to you”
- Believing you would “handle it much better”
- Labeling others as “too sensitive”
- Inappropriate responses/advice
- Inability to see how you affect others
- Difficulty maintaining relationships



Building Empathy

Skill set that can be developed

Takes practice/exercises

Takes time

Makes a difference

Coaching/training available





Practice Mindfulness

BUILDS AWARENESS

INCREASES YOUR ABILITY TO BE PRESENT

-YOU CAN START WITH FOCUSED
BREATHING EXERCISES AND BUILD FROM
THERE

Be Curious/Ask Questions

- Questions help with connections!
- Read books/watch movies to help imagine what someone else's experiences might be like
- Ask yourself what emotions you'd be feeling
- Ask yourself what support you'd want to have offered



Active Listening

Focus on words and feelings

Listen without thinking about what you're going to say next

Repeat back what you've been told

Pause and consider what you want to say after the speaker has finished



Watch for Non-Verbal Clues

- Body Language/Posture
- Gestures
- Facial Expressions
- Distractions



Question Your Assumptions/Biases

Avoid snap judgments and be ready to question them

Seek to understand

Consider other possible perspectives

Give the benefit of the doubt



Get Feedback

Ask others for their feedback

Do you feel like I've understood you?

Acknowledge Mistakes

Show gratitude



Look for New Experiences



- Get out of your comfort zone!
- Cultivate humility to appreciate feelings you aren't familiar with
- Celebrate others

Why We Need Empathy in Leadership

For Ourselves

- Being Person-Focused will make you a better teammate/coworker/boss
- Form real connections
- Improves your ratings



Why We Need Empathy in Leadership

For our Libraries

- Improve effectiveness as a leader
- Increase trust and collaboration/better culture
- Better communication with your team
- Retain talent
- Better match team members with goals



Why We Need Empathy in Leadership

For our Staff

- Watch for burnout in others
- Help others discover and uphold a work/life balance
- Need empathy to get to compassion



Connect THEN Lead

Connect – better leadership development

Connect – better relationships

Connect – improved mental health

Connect – sensitive to anxieties

Connect – share your own vulnerabilities

Connect to get to the ACTION of Empathy



Too Much Empathy?

Burnout
Feeling Frozen
Cloud Judgment
Favoritism (real bias or perceived)
Oversharing



Empathy without Action?

Can't overcome freeze

Lip Service

Need to show you care/offer help

Failing to act makes empathy feel insincere



Empathy Tips

- Say – I can only imagine.... Or I can see how much this hurts you...
- Pause before sharing your story – this may not be the time
- Consider what action (if any) is needed
- Consider your roll in a personal vs policy or system issue at work
 - If policy/system issue – take action!
 - Be ready to let it go if it isn't something that you can help solve (personal)

Balanced Empathy

- Emotional Labor is a real thing – avoid your own burnout!
 - Take breaks
 - Get Sleep
 - Eat Meals
 - Reflect
- Consider how employees/teammates can accomplish shared goals while they are struggling – what can be done?

Boundaries

- Allow people to lean on you, but EMPOWER them, too
- Avoid “I” statements, look for “we” and “our” statements for participation in problem solving/action items
- Avoid oversharing – think ahead!
- Pause and reflect then force yourself to take action
- Find a balance to avoid favoritism – some employees aren’t stronger; they are just more private.

Conflict Resolution

- Address concerns and complaints to build trust
- Make sure employees feel heard and supported
- Use resources to assist when needed
- Carefully consider and question your biases to avoid favoritism
- Carefully consider and question your judgments to avoid false assessments of situations or people
- Remember that not all people will share in the same way and be aware



(Pity ->) Sympathy -> Empathy -> Compassion

THOUGHTS -> FEELINGS/UNDERSTANDING -> ACTIONS

SEPARATION/RELIEF/ADVICE -> CONCERN/DISTRESS -> HELP/ALLEVIATE

FEEL SORRY FOR YOU -> FEEL FOR YOU -> FEEL WITH YOU -> HELP YOU



Empathy is
Crucial for
Libraries and
Leaders

Empathy with
Action is our
Superpower

Thank you!



Megan Rose
meg@dcl-lib.org

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READING



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