

# **MODULE 1: START HERE**



# Empathic Leadership

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Studies show that empathy is one of the most important qualities of effective business leaders, and that empathic leadership is a major driver of inclusive environments and organizational success.

Most people show up to work with the innate desire to do well at their jobs. It's our role as leaders to enable all of our employees to perform at the highest level possible.

Empathic leadership is a critical factor in creating a work environment that fosters success by...

- Heightening employees' feelings of inclusion and belonging
- Maximizing the professional potential of everyone on the team
- Harnessing interpersonal relationships for improved organizational outcomes

# Course Objectives

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In this course, you will learn:

- The definition of empathy and empathic leadership
- The benefits of empathic leadership in the workplace
- Where you stand as an empathic leader
- What empathic leadership is vs. is *not*
- How to cultivate empathic leadership skills

**MODULE 2:**  
WHAT IS  
EMPATHIC  
LEADERSHIP?





# What is Empathy?

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Before defining empathic leadership, it's important to understand what empathy is.

*Empathy is...*

The ability to notice, feel, and understand other people's diverse emotions and experiences, even when they're quite different from our own.

# What is Empathy?

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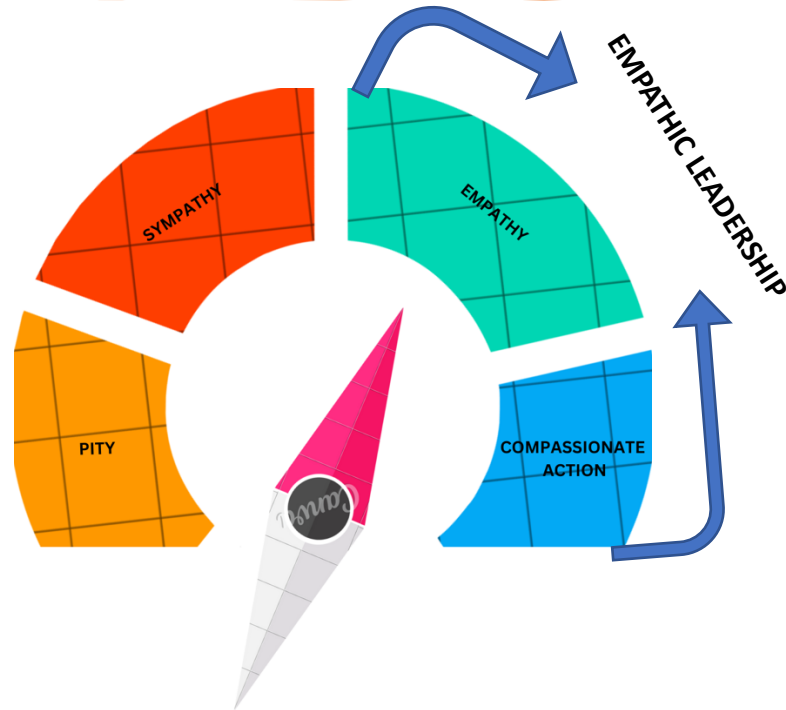
Empathy is different from pity or sympathy, which are associated with feeling sorry for someone, or just feeling for them in general.

Empathy is a state that allows us to even more deeply understand and be with others in their experience.

Then, compassion, which integrates both reasoning and emotion, allows us to *act* on our empathy to offer support when it's needed.

# What is Empathic Leadership?

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In this course, our definition of **empathic leadership** *includes* the idea of taking **compassionate action** to offer productive support to your team members.

# What is Empathic Leadership?

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*Empathic leadership is...*

The application of empathy to inform:

- **Supportive and effective *actions***
- **Inclusive policies and practices**
- **A work culture where everyone feels seen and valued, safe to fully be who they are, and able to contribute authentically to the team.**

When business leaders cultivate and role model empathy, they create mutual trust and maximize diverse talent, which drives inclusion and success.



# **MODULE 3:**

## **WHY IS EMPATHIC LEADERSHIP IMPORTANT?**



# Why is Empathic Leadership Important?

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The stats clearly show that empathic leadership is a highly impactful skill. But why?

Let's take a look at just a few of the reasons empathic leadership is so important for enhancing business outcomes.

# 1. EL Optimizes Employee Performance

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**Empathic leadership creates a safe, non-threatening work environment, which is necessary for all employees to fulfill their maximum potential.**

Studies show that when people feel safe, the brain responds in a way that supports:

- High-level thinking
- Executive tasks like project organization and time management
- Creativity that leads to innovation
- The emergence of dormant leadership skills

This is due to *neuroception*, which is when our brain responds to cues of safety and risk in our environment, even when we aren't aware of it.

# EL Optimizes Employee Performance

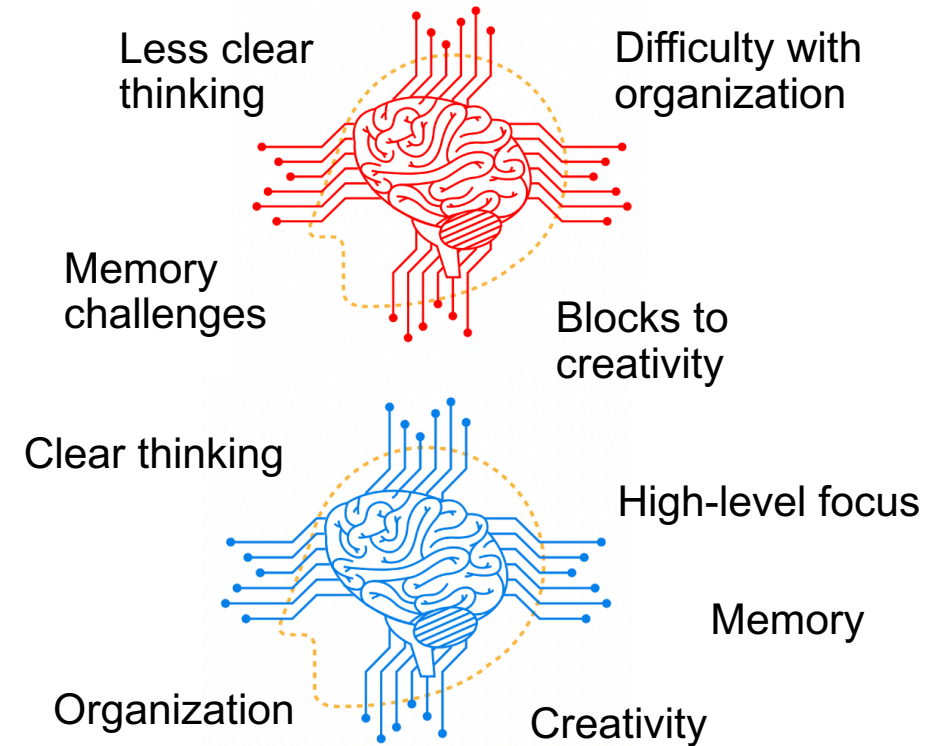
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When the brain senses **threat**, signals are sent to the brain that **inhibit its ability to function** at an ideal level.

This can lead to...

In **non-threatening** environments, signals are sent to the brain that allow it to **function optimally**.

This lets us engage in critical tasks such as...



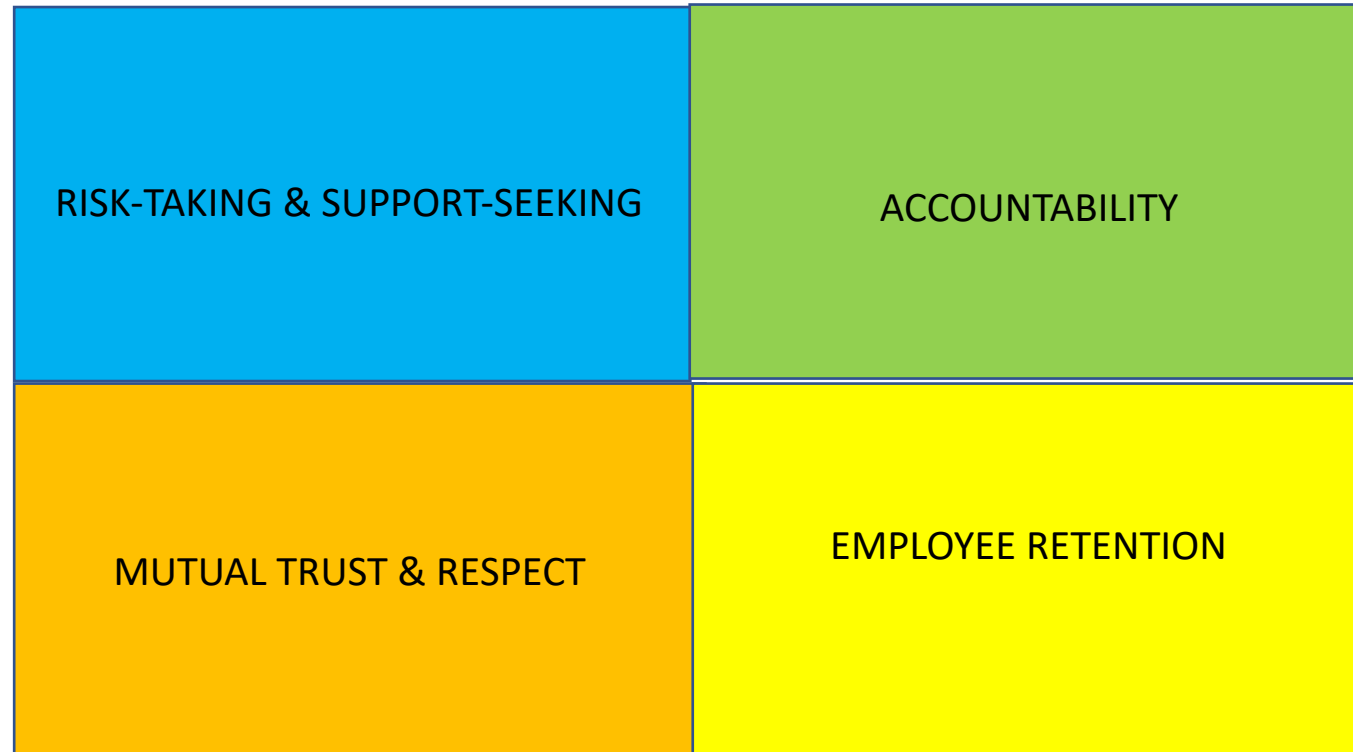


## 2. EL Supports Positive Employee Behaviors

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Empathic leadership changes the way your employees feel, think, and act at work. Click each domain below to learn about the positive impacts of empathic leadership.

*(cards flip over for more information)*



Empathic leadership creates an environment where people feel safe to be themselves, which means they are more likely to:

- Ask for the help or resources they need to succeed
- Take creative risks that can lead to innovation

To encourage the support-seeking and healthy risk-taking behaviors that elevate team performance, employees need to feel they have empathic leaders, and can make mistakes without repercussion.

An empathic approach to leadership does *not* mean there is less accountability among team members.

In fact, in empathic work environments, employees are more likely to take accountability for their mistakes because there isn't a fear of negative repercussions.

Having empathy for others' experiences, feelings, and perspectives establishes relationships founded on mutual trust and respect, which drives better collaboration and more innovative outcomes.

Empathic leadership fosters mutual trust and respect by creating a work environment where everyone can be who they are.

Statistics show that employees are more likely to stay with companies that value empathic leadership:

- Nearly 50% rated empathy a critical contributor to how positively they saw their companies and leaders, especially during the pandemic.
- 60% said they would willingly take a job with a reduced salary if it meant more empathy in the workplace.

*\*Statistics are from studies by Forbes, McKinsey, and Businessolver*



# MODULE 4: SELF-ASSESSMENT



# **MODULE 5: HOW TO BECOME AN EMPATHIC LEADER**





# Striking a Balance

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To lead with empathy calls for the right balance between compassion and professional boundaries.

Genuinely caring about employees doesn't mean you can't address them with clarity and honesty.

In fact, having empathy often means we're *more* able to give feedback when it's needed, and to do so in a way that is both understanding and direct.

Employees are also *more* likely to take accountability when there isn't a fear of negative repercussion.

With the right tools and practices, you can achieve this balance.

# Empathic Leadership is & is Not...

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Let's take a look at what empathic leadership *is* versus what it is *not*:

## **Empathic leadership is *not*:**

- Crossing professional boundaries or offering advice on personal matters
- Taking on other people's feelings and challenges as your own
- Avoiding direct conversation or constructive feedback

## **Empathic leadership is:**

- Appreciating all employees for who they are as people
- Having compassion for others' experiences and perspectives
- Creating an overall environment where everyone feels safe to be who they are

# Scenario: is vs. is not

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You're a team leader at your company. A month ago, one of your high-performing team members, James, experienced the death of a relative, and since then, he has been noticeably missing some important deadlines, and just doesn't seem to be himself. You want to address this.

*Role-play questions & feedback for navigating the conversation*

*(scenario is already written)  
(@3 minutes)*

# Building Empathic Leadership Skills

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## **Exercise your empathy muscle!**

Everyone has inherent empathy, but for many people, bringing it into daily experience can require practice—much like exercising a muscle.

Here are 4 exercises to tap into empathy and advance your leadership skills:

1. Perspective-taking
2. Active listening
3. Understanding formative experiences (your own and others')
4. Self-regulation



# Perspective-Taking

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Perspective-taking is to temporarily adopt new perspectives in order to see things the way others might, based on their own identity, background, or position in an organization.

When you're thinking about a situation, keep in mind that you might not be able to see all aspects of it if you're only looking at it from your own perspective.

# Perspective-Taking: Practice

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Imagine applying this idea to the workplace.

For example, when you face challenging behaviors with colleagues or employees, think about how your empathy for that person might increase if you were to zoom out to see the bigger picture, and to consider the other person's own identity and experiences.

Bring to mind a specific situation, either one you're facing now or have faced in the past, and reflect:

What important parts of the other person's life and experience might you not be aware of?

*(text input box)*

How could understanding this impact your ability to address the situation productively and inclusively?

*(text input box)*

# Active Listening

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Perspective-taking is important for building empathy, but we can't truly know someone else's experience until we ask, and *really* listen.

Active listening means to use more focus and attention than we typically do. It also means listening just to listen, instead of thinking about your response while someone is speaking—a habit that many of us have.

Often, we become easily distracted, or feel rushed to move onto the next thing. This means we might miss something important.

Active listening leads to better understanding of team members, their challenges, and even new ways they can contribute.

Learning about employees and colleagues increases your empathy as a leader, and helps enhance team relationships and productivity.

# Active Listening: Practice

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A great practice to track your active listening skills is to reflect back to the person speaking what you heard them say. This not only gives them the opportunity to correct any mistakes and guarantees that you have all the information you need—it also lets others feel heard and understood.

**Let's try it!**

# Understanding Formative Experiences

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Another important part of empathy-building is understanding the impact of *formative life experiences*. These are experiences that play a role in shaping who we are.

We all have them, both positive and challenging, and research shows that even very early formative experiences can affect behavioral, learning, and communication styles throughout life, especially in moments of higher stress.

It's essential for leaders to understand that *everyone* on a team has had diverse formative experiences.

These experiences and their impact on employees can vary widely.

That's why creating an environment where everyone feels able to be who they are is a key determinant in successful workplaces.

# Understanding Your Own Formative Experiences: Practice

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In order to see and treat others with greater empathy, we have to first start with understanding ourselves!

Try this *Life Map* exercise ([hyperlink](#)) to shed light on some of your own formative life experiences. Think about how they might still influence your styles of working, communication, and leadership.

# Understanding Others' Formative Experiences: Practice

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In times of conflict, many of us default to thinking something like, “What’s wrong with you?”

To build empathy, you can instead try wondering, “What’s your experience?”



# Self-Regulation

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When the state of your emotions and nervous system is not in an ideal place, it impacts your thoughts and actions, makes it difficult to tap into empathy, and affects everyone around you.

Many things can bring you out of balance....

- stressful situations
- distracting thoughts
- basic needs like a lack of sleep or food

....all of these things can send you into a stress response.

When you're in this state, it's hard to tap into empathy.

You're far more likely to become defensive instead of being able to actively listen to others, and to **react** instead of **respond** effectively.

# Self-Regulation

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As a leader, your **circle of impact** is very wide (*animated visual of circle of impact*).

You interact with many people at different levels of your organization everyday. Even when you don't interact directly with others, your actions still affect them.

Your state influences *all* of your leadership choices, and trickles down to *everyone* in your circle of impact (*animated visual*)

So it's extremely important to be able to recognize what state you're in, and then to regulate it when needed.

Self-regulation means both making sure your basic needs are met, and also using certain practices to restore productive thinking.



# MODULE 6:

## Learning Adventure



# Learning Adventure

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Learning about empathy and practicing empathy-building exercises lays the foundation for becoming an empathic leader.

But it's critical also to be able to apply these skills in real-life situations.

**In the following workplace scenario,  
put your empathic leadership skills into action!**

# Conclusion

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Empathy is a critical skill for successful leaders.

When everyone on your team feels safe to be who they are, and to freely share thoughts and perspectives, it can benefit your organization in a multitude of new ways that you might never have conceived.

Empathic leadership...

- Drives a culture of inclusion and greater company success
- Includes professional boundaries
- Positively impacts:
  - Health risk-taking & support-seeking
  - Accountability
  - Mutual trust and respect
  - Employee retention

# Conclusion

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Empathic leadership is something you have to continuously practice.

A few helpful exercises for empathic leadership skill-building are:

- Perspective taking
- Active listening
- Understanding formative life experiences—both your own and others'
- Self-regulation

For more concrete exercises to cultivate empathic leadership, download our **Empathic Leadership Skill-BUILDER Workbook!** ([hyperlink](#)).

# Completion

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Congratulations! You've completed the *Empathic Leadership* course! You're now on your way to making more informed and impactful choices about your interactions with your team members, and truly elevating your company's culture.

Reminder:

Continue learning with our **Empathic Leadership Skill-Building Workbook** ([hyperlink](#)), which offers more practice for cultivating and role modeling empathic leadership!

