

Developing Empathy and Compassion to Avoid Division in the Workplace



The increased diversity and division in our culture these days makes empathy and compassion in the workplace an even more critical skill for employees and employers to develop. Without empathy and compassion, the workplace would be an emotional battlefield where no one would feel safe to share their ideas or concerns, ask for what they need to improve their work, or have a healthy work-life balance for fear of being fired.

Empathy and compassion are the cornerstones to creating a work environment that promotes healthy interaction, positive morale, and a sense of feeling valued in the workplace. In fact, according to research

conducted by McKee, David, Chaskalson, and Chussil in 2017, increased empathy impacts our work effectiveness, thereby improving our skills as workers and managers.

The general consensus among researchers is that empathy is the ability to sense another person's emotions, while also being able to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. Empathy is the foundation of compassion, which is defined as the concern for the suffering or misfortune of others and a desire to alleviate that suffering.

In other words, empathy is identifying and sympathizing with what the other person may be experiencing and feeling, while compassion is the act of helping that hurting person either physically and/or emotionally.

Many corporations have been utilizing employee trainings with a focus on developing the five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional intelligence is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as: "The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically."

Although empathy is not an attribute that all people are born with, it is a skill that can be learned by using self-awareness and mindfulness to notice how our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors affect those around us. Empathy is also gained through the process of reading non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.

According to [PositivePsychology.com](#), there are eight strategies to developing empathy:

1. Cultivate curiosity about the people you interact with who may come from different religious, ethnic, or political backgrounds.
2. Step outside your comfort zone and learn something new, which can foster feelings of humility and lead to empathy.

3. Ask for feedback from others regarding your active listening and relationship skills and identify areas that you can improve.
4. Examine how your biases impact your capacity to empathize when you make judgments about others who are different than you.
5. Spend time with others who you usually don't connect with and practice active listening to help you "walk in their shoes."
6. Practice having difficult but respectful conversations with those who have different points of view by listening without interruption and being open to new ideas.
7. Work on a shared cause with people different than you. Research has shown this can help to heal differences and remove biases.
8. Expand your reading and expose yourself to different points of view through a variety of articles, books, and newspapers.

As we become more mindful of the way we treat others, we can take responsibility for doing our part to create a more accepting and validating environment in the workplace. Developing the skill of empathy, which is a necessary step to compassion, is crucial to promoting the evolution of a supportive and thriving workplace atmosphere.