



When we enter the workplace every morning, we don't check our humanity at the door. Awareness of the psychology of motivation and the role of empathy in effective leadership will help you inspire loyalty and increase your employees' productivity. Understanding the difference between empathy and sympathy boosts your management style to elevate your team's performance.

We're all familiar with the terms "higher-ups" and "powers-that-be", and how a disengaged hierarchy can leave employees feeling dis-empowered or devalued. While sympathy can demonstrate compassion for others, it also speaks to that division within a hierarchy and an imbalanced, one-sided vulnerability. When required, a sympathetic approach provides a situational bridge between supervisor and employee but fails to establish an enduring rapport.

Empathy, on the other hand, goes beyond observation and enters the realm of authentic relating. It is identifying with your team members through the spectrum of human emotions. Even if your experience is within a different context, conveying your familiarity with what your employees are feeling establishes a sense of trust that facilitates productive communication. It's the difference between, "I'm sorry you feel that way." and "Yes, I know how that feels." One shuts the door to communication, the other opens it.

As well as having a unifying effect, an empathetic leadership style provides an opportunity to determine how best to motivate your team. If you don't understand who they are, how can you know what motivates them?

For example, your employees are more than the qualifications listed on their resumes. Every one of them has untapped qualities they may desire to employ but feel are nonessential for their position. An effective leader not only maximizes their employees' advertised spit-polished abilities but also uncovers their diminished strengths and puts them to purpose. Promoting an atmosphere within which employees are able to exercise their diversity will increase enthusiasm, and therefore, production.

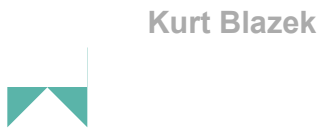
Companies function through interdependence. By practicing an empathetic approach in your leadership role, you will set an example for healthy working relationships. When

you validate your employees' needs, experiences, and feelings, they will exercise empathy in return. This mutual assurance of value will crystallize commitment to the team and fuel excellent performance, to the benefit of the organization as a whole.

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Kurt Blazek

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