



500 WORDS ON LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

Welcome to your new Superpower – Empathy

There is a lot of anger in the world right now. People are angry, politicians are angry, children are angry, parents are angry. In the midst of all this anger, the ability to show empathy stands out. If you can master and understand what empathy is and how to display it, you will have harnessed an important superpower.

But what is empathy?

The common definition is to be able to 'put yourselves into someone else's shoes'.

But recently, we have come across a better interpretation which is 'being in sync' with someone.

It's hard to always get inside someone's head (or shoes) and understand exactly what they are going through. We all have different life experiences and sometimes it can be a step too far.

However, by being in sync with someone, you can get a better connection and learn to work well with them.

With the adoption of technology, the world has started to feel like a very small place. Never before have individuals been able to connect in the way they can now. However, the very technological developments that have brought people together have also pushed people away. In an age of such connectivity, why do so many people feel unconnected, alone and adrift?

According to the Global Risks Report 2019, for many, the world is becoming increasingly anxious, unhappy and lonely. The World Economic Forum backs this up with their own research, stating that mental health problems now affect 700 million people across the world.

In these studies, technology has been cited as one of the main reasons people feel angry, isolated or anxious.

In fact, technology and social media, in particular, has led college students to be 40 percent less empathetic than students in the 80s and 90s according to a study by University of Michigan.

"It's very hard to be empathetic and feel for another human being if you can't read another person's emotions. You don't learn emotional literacy facing a screen. You don't learn emotional literacy with emojis." Dr. Michele Borba, author of UnSelfie

Fixating on the number of Likes and virtual friends you have doesn't help you build real connections with people in your day to day life.

So, how can we rediscover empathy and add it to our superpower toolkit?

Firstly, empathy should be practised regularly to become a superpower habit.

Whilst you might think you're not an empathetic person, you can train yourself to change. You need to recognise and understand your own emotions so you can then see other people's feelings. You also need to interact with people.

An important distinction to make is you don't need to feel someone else's pain but you do need to see it.

You need to swap lenses. Being empathetic is looking at others through their lens, not yours.

When you start to see other people, collaboration and trust explode.

Empathy is more than a skill; it's an invitation.

So, harness your superpower today by understanding that empathy is not an emotion but is about being in sync and it does require effort.

You don't need to focus on feeling; you need to focus on seeing – seeing other people's pain, their emotions and their uniqueness.

Don't pity but do accept someone else's pain as valid.

Empathy is being in sync with someone else's emotions — it's a superpower that makes people visible.

"A world without empathy is inconceivable."

Mark Davis

Yours,
Dr Marcus Gottschalk
CEO



If you're constantly buried in your phone, not raising your eyes from the screen to make meaningful eye contact with real people, then it's no wonder loneliness and anger is becoming more prevalent.