

### Module 3: Powerful Conversations

## Empathy Hacks

### **How can you increase your empathy?**

Empathy can be a tough cookie to crack, especially these days.

But empathetic skills are crucial and their benefits are unparalleled. So why, exactly, is empathy important?

### **Why is empathy important?**

First, empathy helps you understand why people around you do the things they do or believe what they believe. Others' actions, no matter how wacky, start to make sense when viewed with empathy ("Well, duh, if that happened to me, I'd probably act like that, too.") And this understanding will make you less judgmental and defensive which in turn helps you avoid unnecessary stress.

Next, empathy allows you as a leader to inspire others by tapping into what they truly value and desire which is a way healthier approach than threats or manipulation.

### **There are two types of empathy: affective and cognitive.**

The first type is affective empathy which is feeling another person's emotions. Many of us well up when we see someone else cry or feel on edge when someone close to us is stressed.

The second type of empathy is cognitive empathy which is also called perspective taking or Theory of Mind. Cognitive empathy is knowing what another person might think, intend, believe, or want, and it is a skill necessary in everything from negotiating a salary to planning a surprise party to motivating staff.

Here, we focus more on the cognitive side, without saying that the affective side is not used at all in everyday work.

### **How can we build our empathetic muscle?**

One of the ways to actively practice your empathy skills in everyday life is through active listening. We could all sharpen our listening skills. Think of all the times you have tried to have a conversation while immersed in a menu, your own thoughts or of course your smartphone.

In the following, 10 tips are briefly and succinctly collected, which make it possible to use one's listening skills in a targeted manner to develop the power of empathy.

### 10 top tips for empathetic listening

1. **Synthesizing** (as opposed to summarizing): *"So it seems like there are really three different issues going on here, which are ..."*
2. Active **listening**: Interjecting "ah", "oh", "hmm", "that's right", ...
3. Non-verbal listening: Show reactions with your body!
4. Echoing: Repeat the last word spoken by the client and pause: Client says: *"... There is a real issue with our API"*. You: *"API, ..."*. Client continues *"Yes, this API has always been an issue ..."*
5. Provocative Questions: Why? So what? Why do you think consultants could help you?
6. Testing the meaning of a word: *"... by abc you mean?"* or *"when you say abc, what exactly do you define as abc?"*
7. Questions about the **past**: *"How and when did this start?"*
8. Questions about the **present**: *"What are you currently doing to fix this problem?"*
9. Questions about the **future**: *"And what do you think will be differently if we solved this for you?"*
10. Questions about their feelings: *"And how do you feel about this ongoing issue?"*