

WBECS 2019

Reflective inquiry tool- Non Reactive empathy

WORLD BUSINESS AND EXECUTIVE COACH SUMMIT

Mirroring:

Sympathy vs. Empathy

“Can too much empathy be bad for me?”

If you embody the emotions you pick up from someone, the answer could be yes. If instead, you notice and release the emotions in your body so you can hold the space for people to safely express themselves, the answer is no. If you want coachees to feel comfortable, trust, and be open with you—the purpose of empathy—you need to let your reactions fade away. You create a safe space for the conversation to unfold by caring and feeling compassionately curious. Then, you can identify and understand what they feel, not to feel it with them.

Empathy as Social Sensitivity

Most people long to feel seen, heard, and valued no matter what they express. They want to feel safe enough to be themselves without judgment. They don't need you to feel sad, stressed, angry or anxious with them. If you take on their emotions, they might feel they have to take care of you. They might feel guilty or sorry for upsetting you.

Empathetic Reactivity – When too much empathy is bad

Empathy starts with feeling the emotional energy vibrating between you. You might physically feel their pain. If you let these emotions sit in your body, your body and thoughts will be emotionally hijacked.

Unbridled empathy can lead to high levels of stress, making it difficult to release the emotions. Leaning into their experience limits your ability to help them process their emerging thoughts. Your interruption, including running to get a tissue, can break the bond of trust. Also, when you embody other people's emotions, you might feel responsible for relieving their pain. You quit coaching as you jump in to fix their problems and make them feel better. Unless people want your help, your reaction will push them away no matter the value of your intention. They might feel less understood. They might feel disrespected or weak when you interrupt to render aid. The response you believe is supportive could damage their sense of safety and trust. They no longer feel they can fully express themselves with you.

How to foster non-reactive empathy

Giving coachees a safe space to work through what they are feeling requires you breathe and release the emotions you feel.

Three tips for reflecting the emotional expression you notice without getting sucked into the drama:

- Notice when emotions arise in your body. Offer what you feel to your client— with no attachment to being right in your assessment—to help them better articulate their own experience. Then relax and let the emotion subside.
- Listen with compassion. Silently hold a safe space for them to process what they feel. If they are quiet, they will signal when they are ready to move on. Or, when you feel a gap, you can ask, "What is showing up for you now?"
- Make sure you are calmly breathing as they express emotions. Breathe in the words, "Courage, Care" so you comfortably hold this important moment for them with grace and respect.

We can accept, appreciate, and encourage expression in others when we observe our reactions and let them go.

If this content is valuable to you, be sure not to miss Marcia in her live online coach session at **WBECs** in June, 2019. The **WBECs** Pre-Summit is a month-long, free learning experience taught by carefully hand-selected speakers covering the most important topics of 2019 in a variety of coaching disciplines.

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