

Jim's Profit Accelerator 245

The Critical Leadership Skill That Is Seldom Taught

It's not analytical skill, motivational gifts, strategic vision, or making the tough call. Each is essential and is either modeled or taught (or both) frequently. What's left? Empathy.

SPEED BUMP: Empathy is as powerful as it is subtle.

Empathy is to *feel* what the other person is feeling. Yes, feelings are problematic these days, but this is about leadership. If you are willing to stop and let yourself feel, and then move into the other person's feelings, you're more likely to say and do a helpful and positive thing.

Empathy isn't soft, weak, or mysterious, and it isn't the opposite of the strong leadership that lifts people up and gets them moving. It also isn't "putting yourself in the other person's shoes," as many like to say. Empathy is understanding how *they* would react to the situation if they were in *their* shoes, not yours. (For more on empathy see page 38 of my book, *The Leader Architect*.) You may want to read that again.

One of my clients leads a company with 400+ employees. When a group of brand new folks was touring the building for the first time (with their guide), she jumped from her seat (in her office where we were meeting) and stepped into the hall, hailing the new folks: "Well, who have we here?" in a happy, welcoming, interested voice. I observed this and added the descriptors as I saw them. She understood that the new folks who were interested in their CEO would respond to someone asking who *they* are, not someone talking about the CEO job, position, viewpoint, and so forth.

SPEED BUMP: The empathy connection comes from welcoming the other's perspective.

How do you learn empathy? Three steps to prepare:

1. **Decide you want to (and be willing to put in the effort).** It's hard to learn, especially if you rely on logic to lead. If you're a logic person, learn about empathy and practice it. Observe the relaxation in the other person's face; that's how success looks.
2. **Assume that you can do better.** We achievers hold a curious split between wanting to do better and wanting to block any suggestion that we need to. Temporarily let go of the part that knows you've got it together (since no one does).

3. Hold on to your self-confidence as you open yourself to the other person's feelings.

This self-confidence knows that it's safe to learn, which includes not knowing for a while.

One step to do it!

Imagine looking out at the world through another's eyes. Get into his shoes (as him, not you) and look out at the world through his eyes. What does he see? How does it feel?

WARNING: For you perfectionists and skeptics: barely IS good enough. Your goal is to "get" enough of the other's feelings to gently adjust your feelings, which are the foundation of your response. Allow extra time and be gentle, starting with yourself.

SPEED BUMP: Empathy is about adjusting your feelings.

ACCELERANT: What nagging issue can you approach with empathy this week?

For more information on how you can accelerate revenues and profits in your business, please call or email me.

A note on **SPEED BUMPS:** Use them to click quickly with an idea that can immediately be implemented in your life as a business leader. Think: "How can I use this today?" or "Who can use this?"

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew, the Business Defogger and Accelerator, helps leaders discover hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Jim has led 9 businesses, worked in 31 companies at C-level, and is an expert in strategy and executive leadership. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights in his Executive Letter (above). Jim holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University. In his new book, *The Other Side of Succession*, he shares how to plan for the future by growing your business now.

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