



DO BUSINESS FASTER™

Jim's Profit Accelerator 256 First Steps toward Empathy

Empathy is one of those “psychological mysteries” that only the weak or intellectual use. Not really. But that’s often the perspective of leaders who don’t understand its power. If they realized that top athletic coaches (Belichick, Bowerman) used empathy, it might be more in favor. The loud, grouchy coaches (above) get their results through a combination of discipline, standards, and their empathy window into their athletes. It’s the empathy connection that powers change. The grouchy standards are fences that prevent wandering or escaping the hard things that great success requires.

SPEED BUMP: The basic leadership trio is discipline, standards, and empathy.

Interestingly, everyone seems to know what discipline and standards are, regardless of how well they employ them in their organization. Few understand empathy, misunderstanding it as “knowing how the other person feels” about the current topic. That’s not empathy, that’s mindreading, and it offers the uncertain results that you would expect.

Here’s a definition of empathy for you. It’s so elusive that the definition by itself won’t help much. (Shameless plug: my book *The Leadership Architect* has an extensive section on empathy, including what it is, how to develop it, and its place in leadership.) The definition: Empathy is feeling how the other person feels; it’s looking out at the world through *their* eyes, not yours. It’s emphatically NOT feeling like they feel, because that’s walking in YOUR shoes, not theirs.

Part of the objection to empathy is the discomfort with feelings. After all, they’re emotional, uncertain, hard to pin down, hard to read, etc., etc. Never mind that most high-performing people are powered by emotion (theirs and their team’s). In fact, the real power in performance is emotion, aimed by discipline and skill, not the reverse.

If you want to develop your own empathy skills, start with your own discipline and logic. Here are your starter steps:

Listen closely to what your person wants or is trying to do. Clarify the goal gently.

Ask why it’s important to them, using the three-step why method:

1. Why is it important to you?
2. Why else?
3. Why else?

Then approach their perspective (fancy way of saying look out through their eyes):

1. What would it mean to you if you were successful?
2. What else?
3. What else?

Then write down your answers to these questions about yourself:

1. What would it mean to you if this person were successful?
2. Why is it important to you?
3. Why else?
4. Why else?

Finally (I know, are we ever going to get there?), write down how you'd feel if the other person were successful. Try for at least three feelings, such as happy, relieved, jealous, mystified, afraid. There are YOUR feelings, not theirs.

SPEED BUMP: Empathy is about feelings, and your ability to express them.

Of course, at this point you might prefer to live in the world of logic and facts, which works also. It's not as powerful as emotion, but it's a lot less work.

If you're still interested in empathy, the final step is to write down one or two feelings that you think the other person is having "right now." If you're especially courageous, kindly say something like this: "I would like to understand how you're feeling. Are you feeling _____?"

Then listen—and listen more. Let the silence encourage them to say more; don't fill the silence yourself.

To close out, ask something like "How can I help you with that?" Listen, pause...pause.

ACCELERANT: Who will help you improve your empathy?

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.