



# Empathetic Leaders

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes and connect with their emotions, thoughts and feelings

The overall wellbeing of employees is highly impacted by the presence of strong, invested leadership. Some managers may feel that being supportive towards their staff means taking on the role of a counsellor or therapist. In reality, being a caring leader is about leading with **empathy**.

## What IS empathy

- ✓ Feeling *WITH* someone
- ✓ Listening without judgement
- ✓ Seeing the situation through another's eyes
- ✓ Acknowledging fears, anxieties, concerns, and pain
- ✓ Resisting the urge to 'fill' uncomfortable space
- ✓ Understanding the individual's cultural context
- ✓ Knowing your limits and referring to experts when appropriate
- ✓ Taking care of your own mental health

## What empathy is NOT

- × Feeling sorry *FOR* someone
- × Seeking to solve another's problem
- × Seeking a silver lining
- × Minimizing the situation
- × Trying to diagnose
- × Sharing your own experiences
- × A specific 'recipe'

## The Impact of Empathetic Leaders

One of the key drivers for workplace wellbeing is **connection**. An employee's sense of connection is strengthened when their managers or team leads make themselves available, take the time to listen to needs and validate concerns. Connecting and relating to one another is especially important in virtual environments, as it provides employees a safe space to be authentic and perform to the best of their abilities.

# BUILDING EMPATHY INTO THE WORKPLACE

(for more information, visit the [“Easing of COVID-19 Restrictions in the Workplace Series”](#))

- **Building trust with your employees is critical.** A relationship where both parties feel safe and respected is essential for empathy to be felt and received.
- **Taking care of your own psychological health is key to being there for others.** Know yourself, your boundaries and what you are capable of giving and receiving. There is strength in knowing when to step back or refer employees to other sources of support.
- **You do not need to know all of the answers,** and there is not always a problem that needs to be solved. Listen generously, with the purpose of connecting to the other person’s commitment, passion, values and desires.
- **Sometimes, people are simply looking to be heard.** Being a leader can mean offering your presence, rather than suggestions.
- **There is no one-size-fits-all approach.** Empathetic leadership requires an understanding of the needs of each team member.

A supportive manager is not a therapist. It is important to recognize the differences:

Supportive Manager	Therapist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listens to needs and concerns</li><li>• Creates safety and trust</li><li>• Provides guidance and support</li><li>• Focuses on performance management and workplace wellbeing</li><li>• Responds to workplace issues and refers personal issues to appropriate service providers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listens to needs and concerns</li><li>• Creates safety and trust</li><li>• Provides education, strategies and coping skills/tools</li><li>• Focuses on physical health, mental health and client wellbeing</li><li>• Accompanies and guides the client in exploring and working through their issues</li></ul>