



SAMPLE

IMAGE TWELVE

[Stethoscopes and Treatments]



Stethoscopes and Treatments

BEFORE PRESCRIBING TREATMENT, DOCTORS ALWAYS DIAGNOSE A PATIENT BY USING A STETHOSCOPE AND OTHER TOOLS TO LISTEN TO THEIR PATIENT'S HEART. LIFE-GIVING LEADERS APPROACH PEOPLE THE SAME WAY—THEY READ THEM BEFORE THEY LEAD THEM.

I'm sure you've made a few trips to the doctor's office in your past. As a Type 1 diabetic, I make several of them each year. I'll never forget getting diagnosed with diabetes in the fall of 1980. I was in college, and everything was going well. I was making good grades, playing sports, had some great friends, and served in a number of off-campus service projects. But that year, my body began doing some strange things. I became tired and thirsty all the time. I could hardly walk up a flight of stairs without stopping to rest. Then, my vision started going blurry. At that point, my roommate insisted I see a doctor.

It was then I got the news—my pancreas had stopped working. I was sent to the hospital and began taking insulin injections for my high blood sugars.

Along the way, I noticed the steps my doctors always took as they examined me. They'd look me over—my mouth, my eyes, and my ears. Then, they'd put a stethoscope up to my heart. Only after observing and listening did they prescribe a treatment.

I recently spoke to a doctor who told me he was taught in medical school to take at least ten minutes to diagnose someone before drawing any conclusions. In other words, good doctors read people before they lead people.

THE STETHOSCOPE OF A LIFE-GIVING LEADER

I believe good leaders follow the same path. They don't merely bark out orders for their team. Even when they know what steps must be taken, they take time to listen and to observe what's happening in the minds of their team members. Just like a doctor who already knows her patient likely needs an antibiotic, she'll still take the time to listen before speaking and observe before diagnosing.

One of the reasons this is necessary is because people send verbal and non-verbal messages to each other, and these messages all contain some subtext. Facial expressions often relay emotions. Body language communicates disposition. People tend to bring their personal lives with them to work. Good leaders function like a doctor, meaning that they lead after determining the backstory. They seek to understand before being understood. Just knowing that a person's behavior stems from both environments and temperament gives us insight. It's like using a stethoscope before deciding on a treatment.

THEIR BEHAVIOR SHOULD INFORM OUR BEHAVIOR

In the last *Habitude*, "Culture and Customs", I explained that context explains conduct. The sooner leaders understand this principle, the better. In addition, this means we must choose our approach based on whom we are leading. Like good doctors, we must be able to "diagnose" our "patients." Wise leaders lead with empathy. We must feel, not just think, as we lead. And we lead based upon who they are, not just who we are.

Why is this necessary for effective leadership?

Empathy has been defined as the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within the other person's frame of reference. It is the capacity to place oneself in another's position. There are many definitions for empathy that encompass a broad range of emotional states. However, for this *Habitude*, we will stick to three main types of empathy:

- COGNITIVE EMPATHY—THE CONSCIOUS DRIVE TO UNDERSTAND SOMEONE'S EMOTIONAL STATE
- EMOTIONAL EMPATHY—THE NATURAL DRIVE TO RESPOND ACCURATELY TO SOMEONE'S STATE
- SOMATIC EMPATHY—THE MUTUAL PROCESS OF BOTH PEOPLE MIRRORING THEIR EMOTIONS

In many ways, empathy is the opposite of apathy, which is to feel nothing. Pathos, a root word connected to apathy, is about passion. Apathy is about lacking passion. Life-giving leaders not only sense passion for their team's mission, but they feel it for their people.

"Having empathy also includes having the understanding that there are many factors that go into decision making and cognitive thought processes," Cindy Dietrich wrote. "Past experiences have an influence on decision making today. Understanding this allows a person to have empathy for individuals who sometimes make illogical decisions ... Broken homes, childhood trauma, lack of parenting and other factors can influence the connections in the brain which a person uses to make decisions."

IN SHORT, WHEN LEADERS HAVE EMPATHY, THEY LEAD PEOPLE OUT OF A DEEP DISCERNMENT OF THE FACTORS GOING INTO EACH INTERACTION. THEY LEAD BEYOND LOGIC.

CASE STUDY OF AN EMPATHETIC LEADER

I'll never forget reading about Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Hughes. He was a commander of the 2nd Battalion, 327th infantry regiment in Iraq in 2003. When his battalion received a shipment of food and supplies for the Iraqi people, Hughes decided the best place to distribute it was the local mosque. So, he and his troops marched toward the house of the local cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to ask if he'd like to oversee the distribution. As the soldiers marched, however, locals assumed they were going to kidnap the cleric or bomb the mosque. A crowd gathered to stop the soldiers with sticks and rocks in their hands, ready for a fight. Two started throwing rocks at the soldiers. It was a tense moment.

That's when Hughes led with emotional intelligence and lots of empathy. He instructed his armed soldiers to stop, to drop down on one knee, to point their guns toward the ground and to look up into the eyes of the local Iraqis and smile. One by one, the locals began dropping their stones, and eventually, they smiled right back. Hughes avoided a conflict by leading with empathy rather than force.

Over my career, I have witnessed the disarming power of empathetic leaders. While they may appear to some as weak, they're actually strong. They display the strength to read a situation and do what is needed to make progress. In fact, I have come to believe these truths about our leadership approach:

1. There is not just one right way to lead.

Over the decades, universities that study leadership have evolved in their thinking. Good leadership is not reserved for the driven personality type that takes charge of the room. There are many effective approaches to leadership.

2. Effective leaders will change their style but not their principles.

Life-giving leaders know what can change and what must not change. Principles that make teams work are timeless: integrity, discipline, clear communication, vision, etc. However, our approach to a situation is based on whom we lead, when we lead, where we lead, and why we lead.

3. Lasting leaders choose their style by observing their people.

This is why successful, life-giving leaders are adaptable. Empathy—or reading the people and the situation first—informs the approach they take. After listening and observing the people around them, they wisely choose a relevant style.

Not only does context explain people's conduct, it should explain ours as well.

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Sample Lesson. Duplication of Any Kind is Prohibited.**

THE STETHOSCOPE OF A LIFE-GIVING LEADER

Years ago, author Stephen Covey taught us that effective leaders “seek to understand before being understood.”¹⁴ For this reason, doctors take time to diagnose before treating a patient. As life-giving leaders, our methods should look much like theirs:

- SHOW ME YOUR EYES—WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN OR EXPERIENCED?
- SHOW ME YOUR EARS—WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD THAT INFORMS YOUR BEHAVIOR?
- LET ME SEE YOUR MOUTH—WHAT DO THE WORDS YOU HAVE SPOKEN REVEAL TO ME?
- LET ME LISTEN TO YOUR HEART—WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE THAT HELPS ME UNDERSTAND?
- WHERE DOES IT HURT—WHAT PAIN (LACK) DO YOU FEEL THAT HELPS ME TO LEAD YOU WELL?

Years ago, I met an NCAA coach who grumbled at his young athletes who had little grit or stamina and felt entitled to perks beyond their scholarship. What's more, when he'd yell at them to toughen them up, they withdrew. They couldn't seem to take his shouting. He assumed they were wimps. During our discussion, however, we looked at the backgrounds of most of his young athletes. Until then, they'd always been the best on their team, they were seldom yelled at, and they were consistently told they were excellent, just for participating. While this did not get them ready for adulthood or college athletics, it did explain their actions. It also helped the coach develop a better approach for coaching his players.

The next season, he learned that when he began with empathy and then moved to expectations, he got the results he wanted. It required him, however, to seek to understand before being understood.

Too often, we fail to seek understanding and jump into the treatment, much like an incompetent doctor who rushes in to see a patient—without their stethoscope. The longer I've been a leader, the easier it is for me to make this same mistake. I've mastered my work, forgetting how hard it was to learn it. I feel confident; I have answers and assume I know what team members are feeling. Sadly, I can forget the basics of relationships.

Katy was a young girl who asked her father if she could play at her neighbor's house one afternoon. Her dad said yes but told her to return by 6 p.m. for dinner. When Katy strutted in the house thirty minutes late, her dad asked for an explanation. She simply said that her friend's doll broke. Her dad asked if she had been helping her friend fix the broken doll.

“No,” Katy explained. “I was helping her cry.”

REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. Why do leaders fail to practice this principle? What makes empathy hard?

2. When is it most difficult for you to use your “stethoscope” to better understand others? Are some personalities or situations harder for you than others?

3. Can you think of a time when you saw a leader demonstrate empathy? What was the outcome?

ASSESS YOURSELF

Circle the most accurate description of your leadership:

1. When team members fail to comprehend directions, I tend to...
 - GET IMPATIENT WITH THEM
 - FEEL SYMPATHY FOR THEM
 - BECOME DISTANT AROUND THEM
 - IMPROVE MY COMMUNICATION
2. If a teammate comes late to a meeting, I usually...
 - ASSUME THEY DON'T TAKE JOBS SERIOUSLY
 - WONDER IF ANYTHING IS WRONG
 - THINK THEY'RE UNDISCIPLINED OR UNREADY
 - ASK IF THEY'RE ALRIGHT
3. When a team member fails at a project, the first thing I think is...
 - “THEY'RE INCOMPETENT.”
 - “HAVE I FAILED TO LEAD THEM WELL?”
 - “I PICKED THE WRONG PERSON.”
 - “I'VE MADE MISTAKES IN THE PAST.”

TRY IT OUT: PRACTICING THE PRINCIPLE

According to Martin Hoffman, a psychologist who studied empathy development, everyone is born capable of feeling empathy. Unfortunately, not all leaders possess an equal amount of it.¹⁵ Each day this week, enter your conversations with an imaginary stethoscope in hand. Ask questions and listen to peoples' hearts before assuming anything or giving directions. Jot down how others react. Discuss it.