

THE LEARNING JOURNEY OF 2020: TOGETHER TOWARDS TOMORROW

Employee Learning Week

THE POWER OF WORKPLACE EMPATHY



Human Resources

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**



The Power of Workplace Empathy

Meredith Lopez, LPC

Faculty & Staff Assistance Program
Human Resources

meredith.lopez@colorado.edu

303-492-3345



University of Colorado **Boulder**

Learning Objectives

- Understand what research says about the neuroscience of empathy
- Learn about the different types & qualities of empathy
- Identify common obstacles to empathy
- Learn simple but lasting ways to incorporate empathy in work and daily life



What is Empathy



Image credit: Vichai Phububphapan | Getty Images



Definition

- Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place.

Benefits

- Greater social connection--important for both physical and psychological well-being
- Promotes helping behaviors
- Allows for one's own emotional regulation



History of Studying Empathy

- The term *empathy* was first introduced in 1909 by English psychologist Edward B. Titchener as a translation of the German term *eingefühlung* (meaning "feeling into")
- Prosocial** --involves being able to understand another person's mental state and what they might be thinking in response to the situation (theory of mind).
- Altruism and heroism are also connected to feeling empathy for others
- “The perception of the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition.” (Rogers, 1959)

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562#history-of-studying-empathy>
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/encountering-america/201303/its-not-enough-listen>



‘Empathy is the listener’s effort to hear the other person deeply, accurately, and non-judgmentally. Empathy involves skillful reflective listening that clarifies and amplifies the person’s own experiencing and meaning, without imposing the listener’s own material.’

— Carl Rogers (1951)



Neuroscientific Research

- Research suggests that there are important neurobiological components to the experience of empathy
 - *The activation of mirror neurons in the brain plays a part in the ability to mirror and mimic the emotional responses that people would feel if they were in similar situations.*
- Functional MRI research also indicates that an area of the brain known as the inferior frontal gyrus (IFG) plays a critical role in the experience of empathy
- Studies have found that neurological conditions can inhibit individual's ability to be empathetic
- Studies showing gender differences in the experience and expression of empathy

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562#history-of-studying-empathy>



Sympathy vs Empathy

- Sympathy-feeling sorry for the other person-imagining how we would feel
- Empathy is entering into “another’s frame of reference” or “stepping into the other person’s shoes”-imagining how they would feel
- Empathy is the next step-action even if it’s just listening

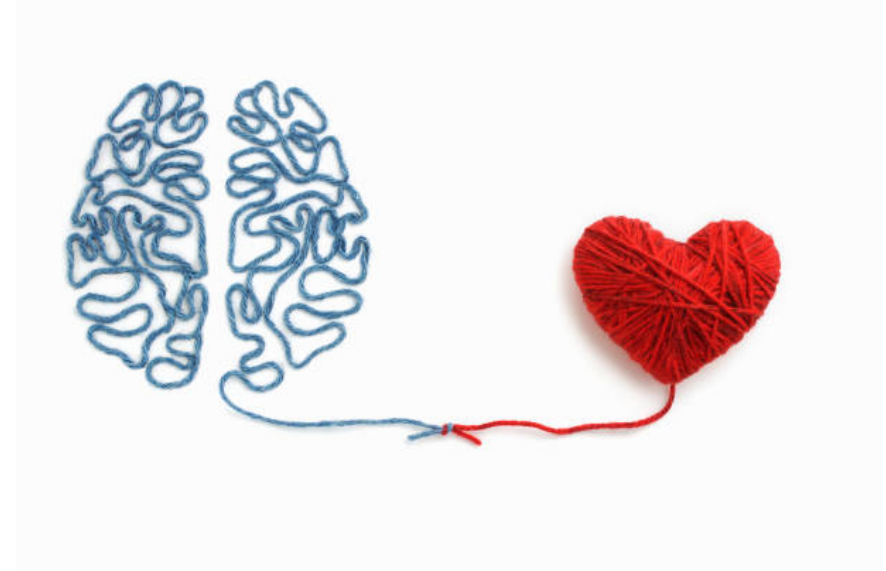


Brené Brown on Empathy-



Characteristics of Empathy

- Perspective taking
- Staying out of judgment
- Recognizing emotion in other people
- Communicating that recognition of emotion



<http://media.virbcdn.com/files/74/676ff59b09b7482f-conceptanalysisofempathy.pdf>

Types of Empathy

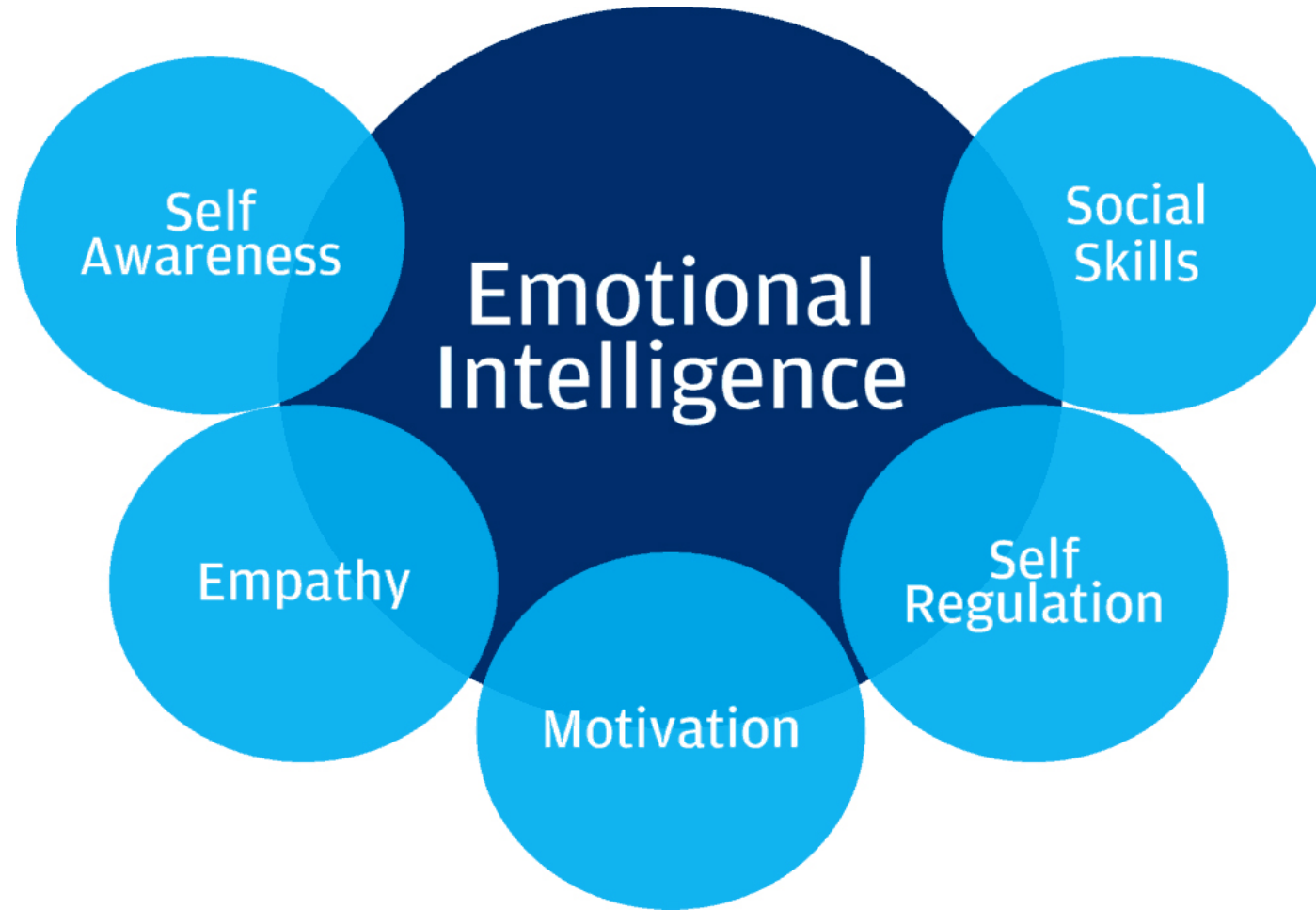
- **Affective** -- involves the ability to understand another person's emotions and respond appropriately
- **Somatic** -- involves having a sort of physical reaction in response to what someone else is experiencing
- **Cognitive** -- involves being able to understand another person's mental state and what they might be thinking in response to the situation (theory of mind)



Think about a time when either someone showed you empathy or you displayed empathy. Why was it important to you? What emotional connection was made?



Emotional Intelligence (EI)



Empathy & Emotional Intelligence (EI)

- Responses to Emotional States
- Power Dynamics
- Tactical empathy

<https://www.verywellmind.com/components-of-emotional-intelligence-2795438>



Can Empathy Be Learned?

YES! It's a muscle we have which can strengthen each time we exercise it.

But....it's hard and it takes work!

- Improvement occurs if we commit to using it in our everyday lives
- It takes intentionality and patience
- When it comes to improving EI skills ask yourself honestly: How does this matter to me?



Tips to Build Empathy

- Awareness!
- Active Listening-work on listening to people without interrupting
- Pay attention to body language and other types of nonverbal communication
- Try to understand people, even when you don't agree with them
- Build trust! Ask people questions to learn more about them and their lives
- Benefit of the doubt before passing judgment on behavior

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562#history-of-studying-empathy>



Techniques for Empathetic Listening

- Verbal and non verbal encouragers
(I see, Tell me more about, nodding head)
- Reflective listening
- Be attentive and present
- Provide feedback
- Defer judgement
- Respond appropriately



“In empathic *listening*, you *listen* with your ears, but you also, and more importantly, *listen* with your eyes and with your heart.”

-Center for Building a Culture of Empathy



University of Colorado **Boulder**

Challenges to Empathy

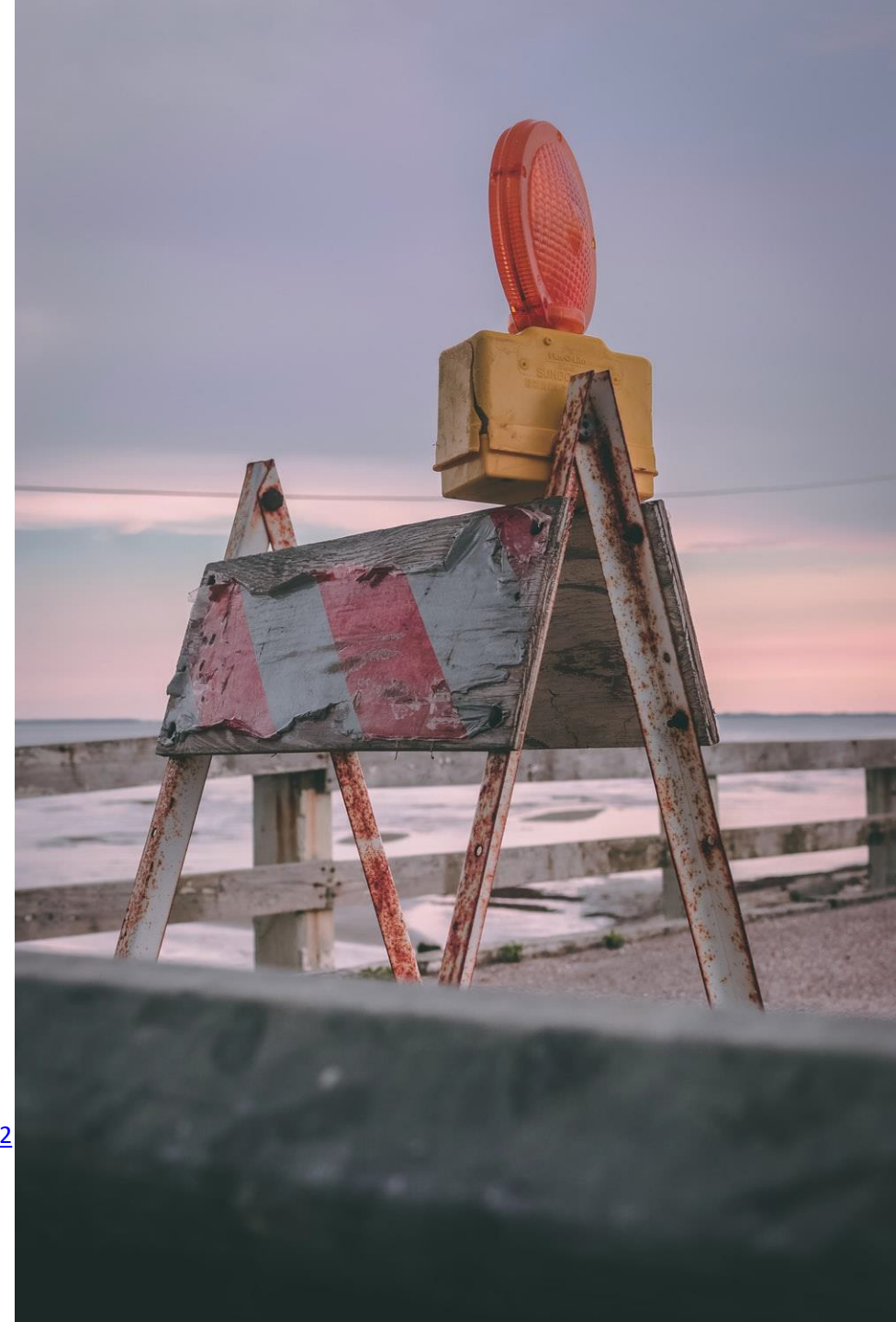
- Cognitive Biases
- Family of Origin
- Mindset/attitude
- Dehumanization
- Preconceived ideas or beliefs

<https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/cultivating-empathy-workplace>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>



University of Colorado **Boulder**



Empathy in the Work Setting



Empathy in the Work Setting

According to [Businessolver's 2017 Workplace Empathy Monitor](#) report, **empathy has a direct impact on employee productivity, loyalty, and engagement.**

Striking data points from the report:

- 77% of workers would be willing to work *more* hours for a more empathetic workplace; meanwhile, 60% would actually accept a slashed salary for the same
- 92% of HR professionals note that a compassionate workplace is a major factor for employee retention
- 80% of millennials noted that they would leave their current job if their office became less empathetic / 66% of Baby Boomers also shared this sentiment



Importance of Workplace Empathy

- Improves employee morale
- Builds trust in professional relationships
- Helps in employee retention
- Creates empathetic employee engagement
- Facilitates conflict management
- Sustains positive workplace relationships



Cultivating Workplace Empathy



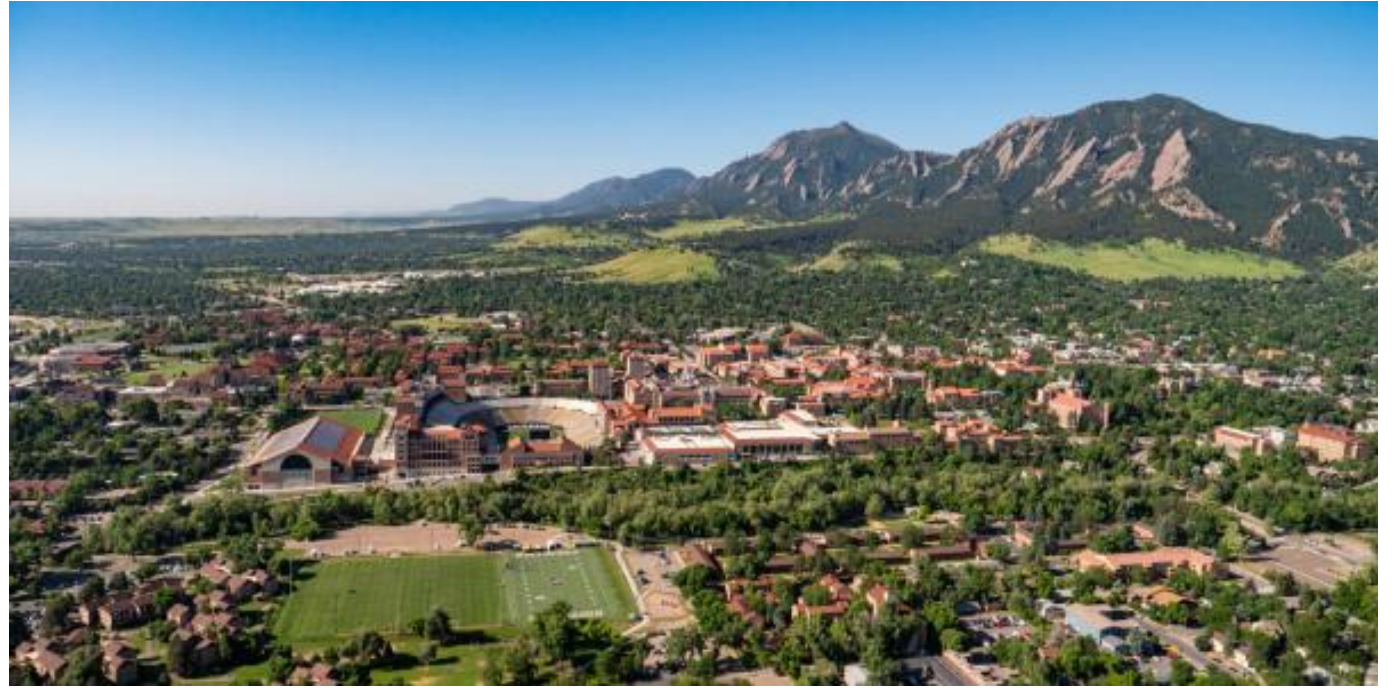
- Lead by example (3 A's)
- Include empathy in organizational norms
- Schedule empathy trainings
- Use of scaling (1-10) to create a common language
- Support the importance of mental health



"I've learned that people will forget
what you said, people will forget
what you did, but people will never
forget how you made them feel."

Dr Maya Angelou





Campus Resources

HR Organization & Employee Development



- Employee learning open enrollment courses taught virtually
- Enrollment open for courses through SkillSoft
- Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations, Franklin Covey, Clifton Strengths, Managers Academy
- <https://www.colorado.edu/hr/learning-development/employee-learning>



Faculty Staff Assistance Center

- All FSAP staff are trained as generalist counselors and are equipped to deal with a wide range of personal and work related issues
- Spanish speaking counselor available; 7 sessions per rolling year (case by case)
- Services are free to all CU Boulder faculty and staff members-individuals, families, couples, and manager/supervisor consults
- Virtual confidential telehealth sessions are available
- <https://www.colorado.edu/hr/faculty-staff-assistance-program>



CU Boulder Ombuds Office



- Confidential, impartial, informal and independent problem-solving and conflict resolution resource for all members of the University community
- Lunch & learns on relevant soft skill topics
- Sharing of information about internal and external resources and referrals
- Informs visitors about informal, formal and administrative options for resolving conflicts, complaints, and disputes
- Provides mediation and facilitation services
- <https://www.colorado.edu/ombuds/>

Summary



**“EMPATHY HAS NO SCRIPT. THERE IS
NO RIGHT WAY OR WRONG WAY TO DO
IT. IT’S SIMPLY LISTENING,
HOLDING SPACE, WITHHOLDING
JUDGMENT, EMOTIONALLY
CONNECTING, AND COMMUNICATING
THAT INCREDIBLY HEALING MESSAGE
OF ‘YOU’RE NOT ALONE.’”**

BRENÉ BROWN

EST. 2014 | VALOURINE



Thank you for joining us today!



References

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2019/07/03/workplace-empathy-packs-a-powerful-punch-increasing-job-satisfaction-motivation-and-productivity/?sh=d70df2c2b608>

<https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/cultivating-empathy-workplace>

<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/how-to-integrate-empathy-work-office-culture-tips/>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2019/11/18/the-importance-of-cultivating-empathy-in-the-workplace/?sh=1d64f2aa7851>

<http://media.virbcdn.com/files/74/676ff59b09b7482f-conceptanalysisofempathy.pdf>

<http://ilabs.washington.edu/sites/default/files/oxfordhb-9780199928019-e-23.pdf>

