

3 Reasons Empathy Is Vital For The Solidifying Of Business Partnerships

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I cover the art, science and practice of collaborative relationships

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Jan 18, 2023, 07:00am EST



Empathy is vital for the forming, strengthening and maintenance of long-term, highly effective ... [+] GETTY IMAGES

When it comes to the traits that help solidify business partnerships, attributes like [trust](#) and a [willingness to collaborate](#) to find win-win solutions can play a key role in building a strong, mutually beneficial relationship.

But how do you get to that foundation of trust and collaboration in the first place? Quite often, it comes down to empathy — or the ability to detect and understand the feelings of others.



Empathy is often confused with sympathy, but it goes so much deeper than that. Sympathy is essentially a sense of pity when someone else is distressed. Empathy, on the other hand, is seeking to truly understand what another person feels, and demonstrate the compassion and understanding they need to feel valued and appreciated.

When leaders better understand what empathy is and how it can make a difference in their business relationships, they can position themselves to participate in more meaningful and successful partnerships.

1. Empathy Considers How Different Factors Affect the Partnership

While empathy is often described as “walking in someone else’s shoes,” true empathy — especially in the business world — can and should be much more than that. As Brené Brown, renowned researcher and host of the *Dare to Lead* podcast explained [in an interview](#) with ConantLeadership, “Our job is that when people tell us the experience of being in their shoes, we believe them — even when it’s different from our lived experience.”

As Brown explained, regardless of who a leader is talking to, their response should be to believe the experiences and feelings of others, “even when [they] can’t reconcile it with [their] own experience.”



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This mindset is especially important when setting expectations for a business partnership. A variety of internal and external factors could affect the viability and results of a partnership — even things such as a partner’s geographic location, capacity or turnover of staff members.

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Empathetic leaders consider the capacities and limitations of partners when setting goals, making adjustments as needed to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.

2. Empathy Drives Open Communication and Shared Goals



Empathy helps ensure successful partnerships because it requires a sense of vulnerability that is often absent from the working world.

As clinician and behavioral psychologist [Natanya Wachtel](#) explained to me, “Displaying empathy allows others to open up to you and honestly communicate their challenges, successes, motives and more. And of course, you should be willing to reciprocate. This leads to more meaningful conversations that help us understand each other as people — not just providers of a good or service. This provides a level of depth and meaning to the relationship that helps everyone truly desire shared success.”

In a business partnership, this level of openness and transparency can help partners identify opportunities for growth and determine whether their contributions are meeting expectations. Even more importantly, it ensures that both parties remain fully committed toward a common goal.

Empathetic business partners seek to be truly transparent with those they work with. There’s no withholding information to try to gain the upper hand. You recognize that these are real people who are working with you to achieve a shared goal. As a result, you are willing to be vulnerable and communicate what needs to be shared so that everyone has the resources they need to succeed.

3. Empathy Allows for Better Resolutions When Disagreements Arise

Even in the most successful partnerships, disagreements, conflicts and other setbacks are bound to arise eventually. It’s easy to see this in the music world — once could argue that



among the many reasons attributed to [the breakup of The Beatles](#), a lack of empathy was certainly a deciding factor.

Rather than trying to understand the different perspectives of the other band members, the group allowed conflict to gradually overtake the feeling of camaraderie and collaboration that had defined their earlier years.

In a business partnership, a lack of empathy can lead to similar collapses. Lower than expected results and deviations from the goals of a partnership can cause business partners to raise barriers and stonewall each other in a time when they should be more open and empathetic than ever.

With a truly empathetic mindset, partners will proactively open lines of communication to understand what went wrong when these setbacks occur. This isn't done to verbally lash out at the partner. Instead, it is done with the goal of finding a collaborative solution to improve the partnership and get things back on track.

While there may be some circumstances where ending the partnership will be the best solution, quite often, approaching these challenges with empathy will help you explore alternative ways to strengthen and fix what was previously a successful business relationship.

Do Better With Empathy

While developing empathy may seem like a challenge, there's a reason why leaders like Brené Brown are so committed to teaching it: this is a skill that you can learn. Just like



any other skill you rely on to succeed in business, Brown has said that empathy is “a teachable skill set. It’s not something that you either have or you don’t.”

With the understanding of the very real impact empathy can have on your business partnerships and other relationships, there’s never been a better time to develop this skill. *Check out my [website](#).*



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