

Use Empathy to Unleash a Huge Reserve of Potential

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Success Coach



Consider the thoughts that go through your mind on a daily basis – the fears, doubts, criticisms, and judgments. If you knew that other people have the same thoughts about life, their mate, their kids, the organization, about their co-workers and bosses, and about themselves as you have, would that make a difference in how you treat them? Behind the façade of behavior and observable personality is a secret world in which people really live. The most successful professionals and leaders skillfully dismantle the wall and enter into that sacred space. When they do so, they can connect with that person at a much different level and unleash a tremendous reserve of performance that can turn an otherwise mediocre performer into a star. Interviewers can discern how well a candidate will fit into the position. Spouses and parents communicate more effectively resulting in much deeper and richer relationships. In essence, when you are able to enter into this secret space, you enter a whole new world filled with potential – human potential.

Behind the Wall

What is this wall behind which people hide and withhold? It is wall of doubt, mistrust, and personal agenda. Until I have a sense that you truly have my best interest at heart, you won't get all of me. Until I feel heard, I'm unlikely to listen. If I hold my agenda as being more important than you or your agenda, neither of us are going to give the other our all.

Self-esteem can play a big role as well. Most people struggle internally with dialogue that consistently questions how they are doing and if they are good enough. These thoughts, coupled with staff and managers who don't validate the person's experience, perspective, ideas, or desires, cause the person to shrink into their shell even further.

Dr. Robert Hartman, Ph.D., philosopher and mathematician, calculated that behind this wall of resistance, people hold back an average of 40% of their productivity and cooperation or teamwork. His work earned him a nomination for the Nobel Prize in 1972 in the field of economics. Specifically, he was able to measure how this wall, that plagues virtually every relationship and organization, impacts the bottom line. How much is it costing your organization or department?

After a person is hired, the wall of resistance is quite obvious in the space of conflict and competition. In some ways, it's a blessing that the wall is so visceral in such circumstances because it increases the chances of reconciliation through formal or informal conflict resolution. Dr. Hartman's research implies, unfortunately, that the vast majority of the 40% loss is far more covert and so it never rises to a level of being addressed head-on. This reserve is literally a goldmine. People hide the best of themselves behind this wall. How can we access this untapped potential? You can start bringing down that wall and transforming your organization, one hire at a time, beginning with the interview process by using one of the greatest gifts human beings possess – empathy.

What is empathy and what makes it so powerful? It's the ability to step into another person's shoes and see/feel their reality from their perspective. It is the primary building block of compassion and compassion is what really brings down the wall of resistance.

Develop Greater Empathy

Empathy is created when you connect at the heart level. People need to feel that you care about them as a person before they are willing to let you peek behind the wall. So the first step is to leave your agenda, judgment, and ego at the door before entering. In other words, let down your own wall and be fully present with them without needing to impress or pretend. Otherwise, they will feel your wall and continue to hold back. Create a safe space for the person to be themselves. It's important that you become very self-aware and self-observant. In these moments, even if you don't say anything judgmental, if you are thinking it, you are likely to show it in the form of emotional energy. Subconsciously, the other person will know it and will continue to hold back. This sacred space cannot be faked; you really do have to care.



Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC | President, Nurturing Your Success Inc., A Coaching & Publications Company

(610) 277-2726 | Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com

PO Box 851, Blue Bell, PA 19422 | www.NurturingYourSuccess.com



There are simple steps to follow to become more empathetic. The hardest part is staying in their space without needing to fix, problem solve, or give advice. Be curious, rather than probing. The intention is to simply understand what they are feeling and what it must be like to be in their shoes at this moment. What is that really matters to them? What are they going through or experiencing? Use your own memories and life experiences as reference points to gain understanding and "live" their experience.

When you think you have a sense of it, validate your idea or understanding in the form of a question. "Are you feeling ____?" Don't be attached to being right or wrong. If you are truly concerned about them, then it won't matter if what you say is right. Being attached to getting it right is not empathizing; it's an agenda. And if you are more focused on having your turn to talk or on solving their problem, then you are also not empathizing. Instead, you are focused on you, perhaps your own need to impress or to fix them or your need to be right or to appear knowledgeable, rather than on learning where they are.

Practice Empathy

Empathy takes practice. But when you are able to step into their world and they know that you understand them, they feel validated as a human being. They feel that it's okay to be them, to feel whatever they may be feeling. It is this validation for their own humanity that unlocks the human spirit from the bondage of the wall of doubt and resistance.

With your next conversation, try empathy. Pay attention to your intrusive thoughts that have you wanting to interrupt or finish their sentence for them. Pay attention to the thoughts that start judging them or telling you that you know the best answer for their situation. Pay attention to the thoughts and then refocus on the individual and their needs. Ask questions without assuming any answers. And just be present to the gift when you are able to see the person come alive from behind the wall. If you really want to transform your organization one person at a time – or your family – start with yourself. Master the art of empathy and connect with people at a deeper level. And as more of your conversations focus on validating others, you'll start to see more people come alive from behind their walls.

Want to learn more about this topic? Contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to arrange a free hour of coaching. Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC is named one of the TOP 100 THOUGHT LEADERS in personal leadership development. Your happiness and success is her business! As a certified coach, accomplished writer, and motivational speaker, Julie empowers your personal best teaching you simple, practical strategies for meeting your goals, communicating effectively, establishing good boundaries, managing your emotions, and living happily. Coaching clients experience dramatic and profound results in their productivity, level of confidence, and relationships. She is the author of the life manual and confidence builder, [The Journey Called YOU: A Roadmap to Self-Discovery and Acceptance](#). Visit www.NurturingYourSuccess.com or www.NurturingYourSuccessBlog.com to learn more about coaching or contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to have her speak at your next meeting or conference.



Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC | President, Nurturing Your Success Inc., A Coaching & Publications Company

(610) 277-2726 | Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com

PO Box 851, Blue Bell, PA 19422 | www.NurturingYourSuccess.com