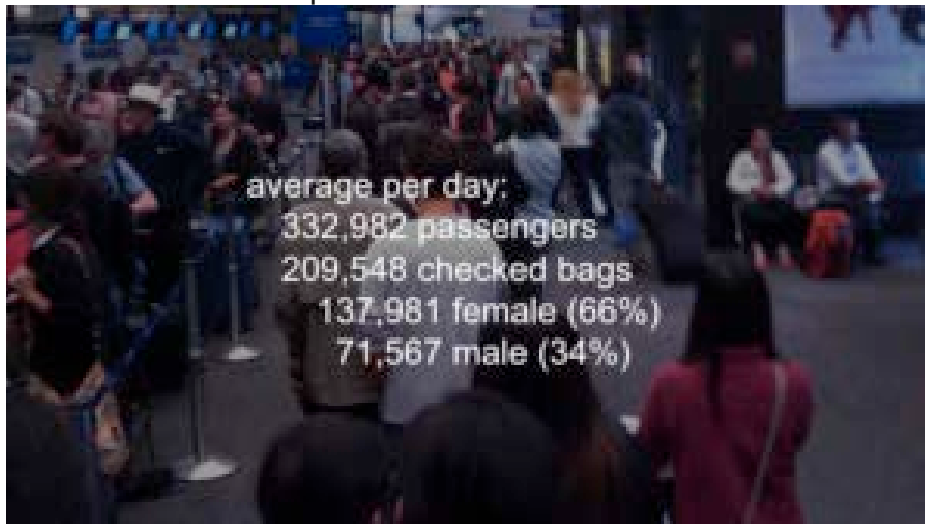


transcript: enabling empathy

How many people have had the chance to actually use empathy in their work? Keep your hand up if that chance to use it was pretty spontaneous. Interesting! There is a hell of a lot to talk about in terms of empathy, and I tried to get it down to 30 minutes, so I'm going to go over this 20 minute limit. In fact when I started writing the book, I thought it would get done in about 3 months but I took a look at what everybody's talking about in terms of empathy and I realized, "Oh my God," it's this big messy pile of stuff, and how in the world are you going to use it in your work when a lot of people are talking about it differently. I have to narrow it down. I have to make it usable for what we do. And everybody in this room does a lot of different things so I needed to make it usable for a lot of different situations as well.

So I want to talk about two things today, the first two are things I actually see people face in their work that I want to solve, that I want to solve with empathy. And then I want to kind of give you this core bit about empathy that you can take and use yourselves and make empathy in your work a little bit less spontaneous and a little more certain. So the first thing I run into a lot that people face are assumptions. So assumptions are by definition those things that you don't think about that you don't realize you have, right? And therefore they are pernicious because they end up making a mess of some of the things you do. Think back to some decision you may have had or something your organization did as a whole and it just came back at you all wrong. It was probably because of an assumption.



So let me give you some examples. This is an example from an airline, I was working with once and they were taking a look at all the passengers that check bags or don't check bags and this happens to be the average passengers of the day and the number of bags that got checked out of the ones that didn't get checked for the day, 66%, about two thirds were female, one third were male. And of course, everyone's walking around the office going, "Oh yea, you know it's because women have more stuff they have to take with them. You know, that makeup and all those shoes, right?" And I'm sitting there going, "Wait a minute, why did you break it up by gender? Why didn't you break it up by age, or why didn't you break it up by type of trip—a business trip or vacation—or why

didn't you break it up by length of the trip, or whether it was international of something?" I mean why gender? That's an assumption.

Another example a little closer to home. A researcher in our very own Berkeley. This was a little bit after the 99% protests, and he had this hypothesis that when you're wealthy, you care less about the people around you. And he wanted to prove it through a bunch of different experiments. One of the experiments that he did—remember we're talking about assumptions here—was he put some people at a crosswalk wanting to cross, and makes notes about which makes and models of cars would stop for them and which makes and models just went right past them. And, on average, the ones that went right past tended to be more expensive cars and so he said, "Oh those rich people, they don't care about pedestrians." And this is an assumption you because if you end up getting a chance to drive your friend's fancy car, are you going to stop stopping for pedestrians? Anyway, there's this idea, in a phrase you all learned in university: correlation is not causation. Just because there was a tendency for expensive cars not to stop, it doesn't mean that driving expensive cars is going to cause you to stop stopping for pedestrians.

Correlation is not causation. You really can't find out what's going on until you ask, "Why?" So, if those cars that didn't stop, if he had chased them down, and gotten the driver to roll down the window and take a little to talk, he could find out. He can't do it by telepathy—the telepathy servers are not working right now.

This (points to slide of something that looks like equipment in a physics lab) is a quantum computer, and it's their best hope for telepathy servers. But I don't think it's actually even going to work for that. So, if you would actually stop these drivers you might have got a lot of answers back. And I'll read these things for you. Over on the left, you have the more positive things, over on the left you have the more positive things.

- Oh my God, you know I meant ... I should have stopped. You're right, I should have stopped, but I was too distracted looking for directions or looking for that address, or the commotion over there that bright things over there.
- Or, I didn't even see the ped, my God, you know that car was in the way.

On the right though, are the more negative, they're like:

- Oh yeah, yeah, I saw the ped but it's just faster if I go through the intersection first and not wait for them, and then, you know, everybody's time will be faster. Or, you know, all the cars behind me—I didn't want to slow them down, you know know, everyone's in a hurry, time is of the essence.
- Or, there are the very few people that don't actually know that it's the law.

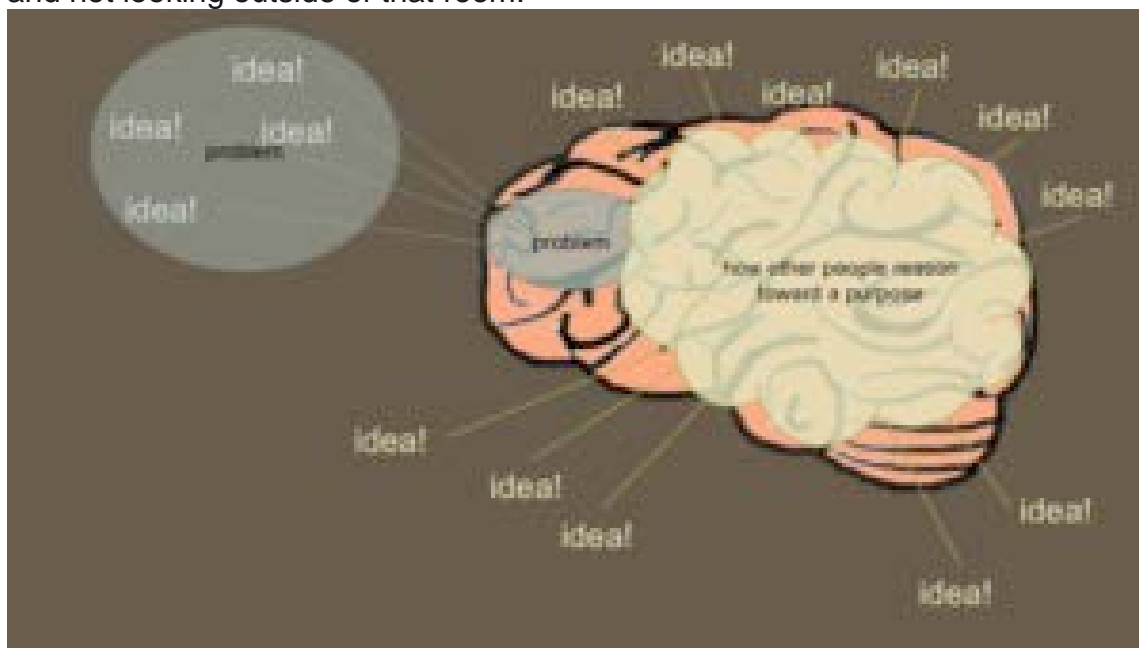
So if you had done this, you could take a look at this set and then maybe, maybe, start drawing some conclusions about wealth, but you really need to start talking to those people about what is wealth. And I'm going to start guaranteeing that not everybody that is driving a fancy car considers themselves wealthy.

I just personally happen to be allergic to demographics. People talk about demographics, and I say, uh-uh. This is all about "assumptions are pernicious."

Let me get back to that bag checking thing. We actually did do the research at that airline and we came up for all sorts of different reasons that had nothing to do with gender had nothing to do with age either. It had to do with:

- Oh God, you know something awful happened to my bag that last time I checked it. Or the last three times this guy had powder on his bag, white powder. Anthrax? Not checking my bag anymore.
- Or maybe it's something precious like your guitar. Or it was a laser medical device this guy was taking to donate in Nepal, and he's like, "I'm not checking that in, God knows that they'll do with it." Right?
- On the opposite end of the scale, it's like, "Oh I've giving this poster at a conference, and I can't fit it into the bin so I'm going to check it in." Or scuba gear. Or this gal who was visiting Belgium and wanted to bring back all this beer, and there's no way you're getting that all beer through security. You have to check it in.
- Or maybe it's the people who don't want to drag their bags through the airport, or they have a connecting flight and don't want to keep track of it—it's only going to take me five minutes to get it off the baggage carousel. Okay, I can deal with that.

So there are reasons, and these reasons have nothing to do with what they assumed was important—gender. Okay, so assumptions are pernicious, and this is one of the things I see people face. And asking is the way you can get past your assumptions. First you have to recognize you have them, though, which is a little bit of a problem. And it's also that asking is the way to find differences. Those differences ... they all show up in parties of four, right? [joking] But there's all sorts of different ways that people have of thinking and you can see these patterns when you ask enough people. Another thing I see people fighting with at work is getting stuck in a creativity loop. This is a little bit like being in a mirrored room, and you and your team are in there and you're designing for each other in a way. Right? It's all about trying to improve what you've got and not looking outside of that room.



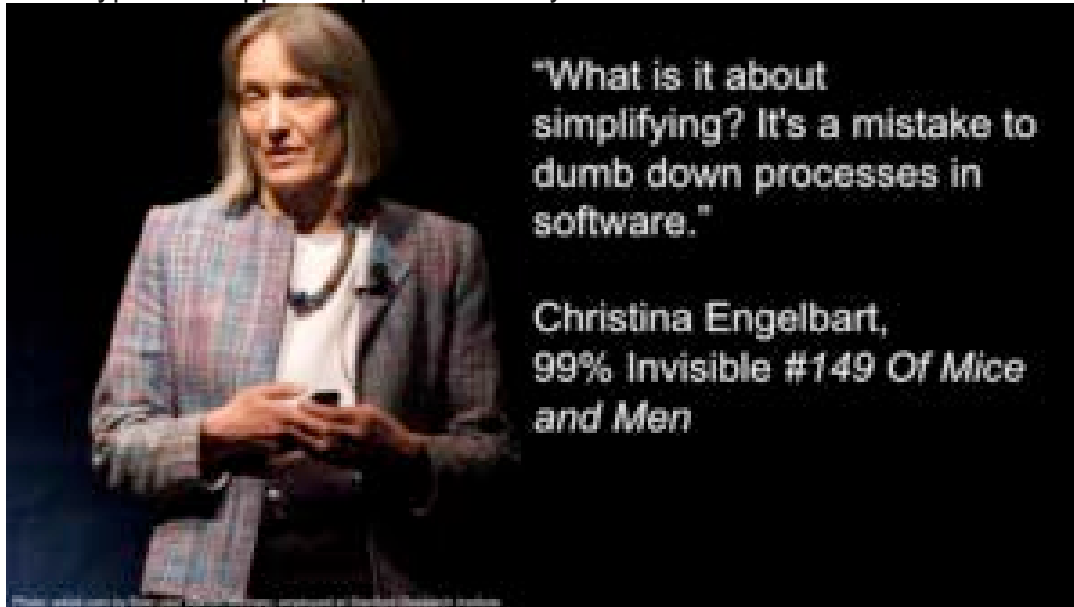
Let me give you a little example. The idea is ... we all know about the creative brain. There have been all those research articles written about creativity, and the times you are creative. And how creative ideas pop up when you're relaxed, and you're not really trying to focus on that problem. But all those ideas that come out are bounded by the

problem that you're trying to solve. One way around this is to put other people's way of thinking into your brain, as well. The problem with the mirror room is that you're trying to solve the problem that you've been looking at. So this is something at twitter ... I have a friend that signed up for a twitter account who does all her social networking on Facebook, and she's in tech, and a year goes by since her last tweet. Twitter sends an email, "Oh, do you know how to tweet?" Really? Yes, I know how to tweet. It's not that hard. I think my five year old daughter knows how to tweet. [laughs] So it's thinking of that person, when they were writing that email, as a person who didn't understand social media.



Another example, which Facebook did, was this whole a year later, "Here's a photo that got a lot of likes." But they were thinking about people who post a lot of photos. And the photo with the most likes they're going then throw in front of them and say, "Hey do you wanna repost this?" Oh! That awesome vacation you went on. Let's repost it and show everybody again. Well, they showed me my ... I think I posted three photos last year ... they showed me my picture of tomatoes. They're like, "Oh, repost it!" And I'm like, well, no, that's kind of banal. That's not ... who cares? And besides, my tomatoes this year are all kind of dead because: drought. Anyway, so that didn't didn't work. But this can be much, much more serious. The year-in-review thing that you may have heard, that happened to Eric Meyer, happened the year that his daughter died of cancer the day before her sixth birthday. That's pretty tragic. And Facebook doesn't have a way of saying, "I support you," Instead they just have the Like button, and so it got a lot of Likes. Because we're all there for him. What a horrible thing to happen, and he needs his community. Now, he is a techie, and he took a look at this and he's like, "I don't want to revisit this." But he doesn't get mad at Facebook. Instead he starts writing some posts and starts doing some talks about how the algorithms are still in beta, really. They took their original idea, with the original audience they had in mind. They stuck it out there, made it work, and then they spent the next ten years tweaking it, instead of reaching out to broader audiences, reaching out to other kinds of experiences. And he says, "I forgive you. This is not your problem, Facebook, this is everyone's problem." Software, anything that you use today, is basically still in beta. It's only been out there

for ten years. We're not doing great; it's the next generation that's going to start reaching out. It's us helping people look at other avenues we can look at and figure out other types of support to put out there yet.



In fact, Christina Engelbart, the daughter of the famous man who invented the mouse, she's talking about the same thing. Why are we simplifying our algorithms? Why is it important to make them simpler? Why aren't we making them broader? More complex? More like an ecosystem with lots of different components that interact? The only way you can do that is to take other people's ideas into your brain at the same time when you're trying to solve problems. And when you do that, this is when broader ideas are going to come out. Now I'm not saying that a broader set of ideas is better—it's just broader. You have more to work with. You have more to consider. You have different ways you can change your focus and different directions that you can branch off into in your work and what you do. It's a lot of opportunity out there. So keep stuffing your brain.

I was just talking to some people earlier and the idea is not to just make this like one big effort, and I'm going to go understand how people are working and thinking and then take it back into my office and figure this out. This is something you do constantly, for the rest of your lives. Do it in little tiny bits, because there's no way to do it full-on all the time. Do it at whatever rate you want. So empathy is the thing that will help us counter the consequences of designing for a everyone, or designing for a very narrow set of people that we started out with in our minds when we first came up with that thing. Empathy is what is going to happen, but what is empathy?

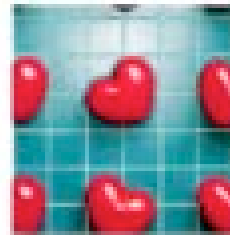
Corporate Empathy Is Not an Oxymoron

By Barbara Bruns
January 2015



As companies work to connect to their

“... become truly **responsive** to the needs of their customers and employees.”



the call for companies to engage in authentic dialogue is increasing. Leaders must not only listen to change is demanded by the flow of opposing views and interests, ensuring that each conversation will reflect how an empathy deficit in the CEO's office could result in lost trust from investors. For example, “We all know it's important to be empathetic, but how do you get there? All you people in my HR department — how do you think that best responds to the message?”

Why Empathy Is The Force That Moves Business Forward

Why Empathy Is The Force That Moves Business Forward

By [Name]

1 Comment 1 Like

“... the ability to **connect with and relate to** others—empathy in its purest form ...”

One of the hallmarks of a successful business is its ability to harness creativity to constantly push into new territory. Without growth and innovation, businesses stagnate and eventually fade away. Those with staying power, however, have mastered an intangible, often overlooked factor that allows them to focus on the future with clarity: empathy. While that may surprise many, I am certain that the ability to connect with and relate to others—empathy in its purest form—is the force that moves businesses forward.

Though the concept of empathy might contradict the modern concept of a **cut-throat marketplace**—competitive, cut-throat, and with



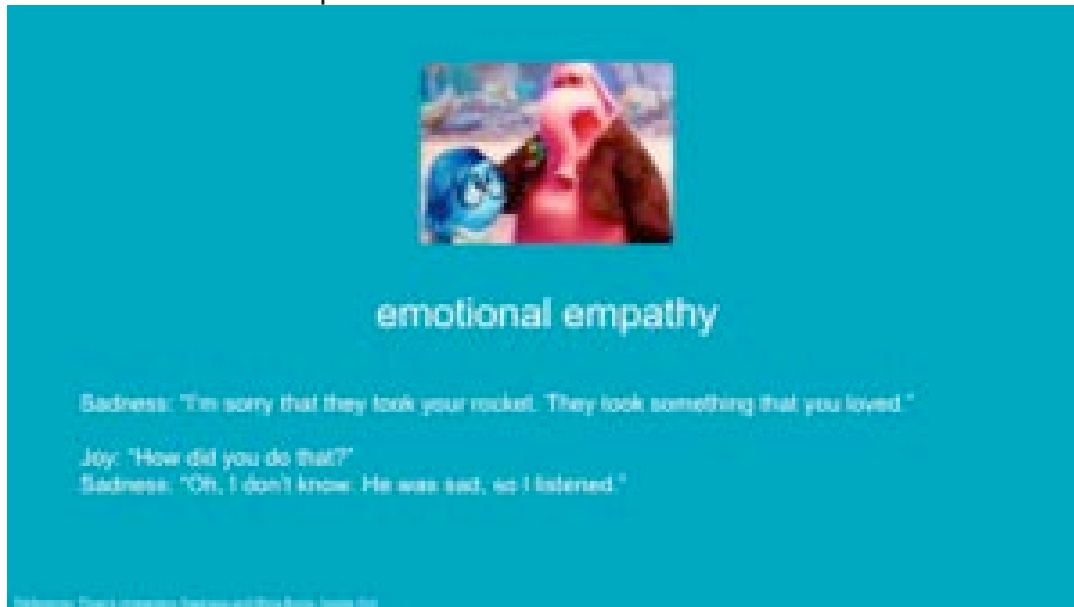
Think about it right now. When I say the word empathy. What comes to mind? Does anybody want to shout out? Listening. Kindness. Consideration for others. Understanding. Putting yourself in the other's shoes. Yes. These are all valid definitions. I hear this a lot. And walking in someone's shoes in one of the most prevalent, sticky, understandings on empathy. And yet, we get these business articles where they go the other direction. The Harvard Business Review talks about empathy being "responsive," then we've got an article in Forbes that talks about empathy as "something connecting to or relating to" something. Then, a recent article which made me kind of not happy, because they're all, "We've got to measure empathy." And empathy to them is "having good intentions and better selves." Nobody even talks about walking in others shoes, which surprises me. So let me talk about the idea that these articles kind of bring up which is, "be more sensitive." And that just seems to be "a better self" sort of thing. How do you make sensitivity a part of your work?

Luckily, sensitivity is just one of the different kinds of empathy. There were eight different kinds of empathy in this article I was reading in psychology literature. I'm going to tell you about two of them today because we have got limited time.

The first of which has to do with sensitivity and it's called affective empathy. Affective means emotional, so we can just call it emotional empathy. That is a little easier to wrap our heads around because we're not psych majors. And emotional empathy is being able to understand what someone else's emotions are and dwell in it with them.

How many people saw Inside Out, the movie that Pixar did? They have a really great example there. It's a movie about the emotions about a little girl as she's grows a little bit older. They different emotions as characters. And one of the emotions was called Joy, and the other was called Sadness. And one of the things this girl was leaving behind from her childhood was an imaginary friend, called Bing Bong, kind of like a pink elephant. And Bing Bong sees his favorite rocket get destroyed. And he's sad. Unfortunately, they're on a quest. They have to do something right now. Time's a tickin. And so Joy is all like, "Come on. Tickle, tickle, tickle, let's get you going. Come on, we've got to go Bing Bong." She's trying to cheer him up so that they can go. Instead, what Sadness does, this is a great example, sits down next to him and says "Oh my

God, that rocket ship meant so much to you. There were so many memories, so many things it represents to you. You must be so sad.” And Bing Bong starts crying. He says, “Yes it was.” And he tells a story about some of his memories, and then he gets up and says, “I’m ready; let’s finish this quest.” And the emotion Joy asks Sadness, “How did you do that?” And Sadness said, “I just had to listen.” Be there with that person. Dwell in that emotion with that person.



So, we unfortunately don't do a very good job teaching our kids empathy. You see a kid in a mood, or with an emotion that isn't appropriate for the time and you say, "Don't be so sad." I saw a toddler and his mom at the playground and they had to leave to go catch the bus and toddler's like "No," and the mom says, "Don't be angry." You're telling him not to have an emotion? So we're learning as we grow up that there are certain emotions we're not supposed to have. Just spend a little bit of time dwelling in that emotional space. There are a couple other things about emotional empathy that I talk about in my book, which go into more detail. I have a couple of copies of my book that I'll give away at the end of this talk. But one of them is "It tends to strike like lightning." It's spontaneous. It's powerful. It's really illuminating. As the people who raised their hands at the beginning have the experience of. But it's not necessarily something you can make happen if you wanted to. So, in your work, emotional empathy is the process of supporting another person through an emotional process.



"don't be so sad"

The second kind of empathy I want to introduce is called “cognitive empathy.” Cognitive empathy is what goes through somebody’s mind and heart as they were trying to accomplish a certain intent or purpose. It’s as if you are listening to their little inner voice. You know you’ve got that inner voice where you’re like, “Oh, did I really want to get up early and come to this thing this morning? Last time I came it was kind of hard to find parking, and I’m just so worn down, my inbox is so full.” You know it’s that little inner voice that’s helping you make that decision. “But, you know I really want to come.” Okay. So maybe you really want to come because this word empathy means something to you and you have a specific reason or connection or history with it, and that’s how you decide. Or maybe you want to come for another reason. I don’t know because I didn’t ask all of you; I asked a few of you. Anyway it’s that inner voice.



cognitive empathy
inner voice as a person aims at
an intent or purpose

But I want to focus on intent or purpose. Intent and purpose is not booking a ticket to go see the client. Your purpose is to make that client feel more supported because they’re feeling a little bit iffy about the way the project is going, and you want to go do that in person. So that’s what purpose is. A purpose is something much more human, much broader, something you can ask your great grandmother. It is something that we have all done for eons. “I want to go support that person so this project goes better. I’m going

to go see that person in-person.” So in your work, cognitive empathy is supporting another person in achieving their intent or purpose. And you do this, at least for what we’re interested in for work, is through your collaboration with other people, and through the things you are creating. So being able to support another person in achieving their intent or purpose. So think about that guy you’ve been fighting with at work. What is his purpose? Or that project that they’re trying to push on you and you don’t think it makes sense. What is their purpose?

So let’s talk a little bit about making empathy happen: walking in shoes. This, like I said, is the stickiest definition of empathy and it’s all about sort of being in the person’s world, trying to think the way that person think. Try and work your way through a scenario you think that person would think. It’s all about applying empathy. And when I go work with clients and talk with them about this, it’s all done by imagination. People are making up what they think other people are thinking. Or they’re saying, “Oh yea, you know, I heard one person saying this, so I am going to go with that.” Or they’re using their own team as an understanding of what goes through people’s heads. And this is how we get into that mirror room. We aren’t, as you can tell in the big space on my slide that is empty, because it’s going to be filled, we aren’t doing development of empathy. We’re not taking the time to actually understand what’s going through other people’s heads. And we live in a world, especially here in the Bay Area, but lots of other places, where we’re going at a breakneck pace, and it’s really important to do things fast. Why? Well, that could be a whole other lecture. But why are we going so fast? I don’t know, but we do definitely need to take time. We need to have little tidbits of time where we grab them and ask and spend time listening with other people. So we get those broader set of ideas jumping out of our heads. This is not going to happen based on imagination.



So listening is something that a lot of people are talking about. This happens to be Julian Treasure, and he has a couple of TED lectures, and in one of them he was talking about how we teach our kids reading and writing, and communicating by the written word, but not speaking and listening—communicating by the spoken word. That’s all just learned by social exposure, and we need to do a better job with that. So, that’s more stuff to go look at.

But another thing that I see companies push back at, is that in your work, oh my gosh, you know if you go and listen to somebody and hear their story, the way I understand it is going to be different than the way you understand it. Words are open to interpretation. They are qualitative. How do we get anything out of there that's reliable? It's like monsters, right? And I agree they are open to interpretation—at the surface. But once you get down into the way people are thinking, there is an amazing clarity, there's an amazing amount of pattern you can see as evidenced by those results from the airline study about checking bags. It's a lot of patterns, and it's totally worth it.



So let me give you a little definition of what I mean by surface and what I mean by depth. Surface is what we're talking about when we talk with each other every day. It's our opinions, it's our preferences, it's our statements of fact. You get home in the afternoon or evening and you say, "Oh, how did your day go?" to somebody else in your house. And they're like, "Oh, it was fine. Ricky didn't turn in his report on time." These are statements of fact. Explanations. We're staying at this level, it's so rare, even with our loved ones, to go down deeper into "Well, what was in your mind? What were you thinking? How did you make that decision? What was the reason for that opinion?" You know, you watched those debates the other day, and you're like "Trump?!" Why that opinion? Where does that come from? How did that get formed? It's really interesting to get down to that depth. There are guiding principles there that you can find and then you can look and see the patterns across people. Like I said earlier, you can't develop empathy using telepathy because we don't have telepathy servers. You also can't develop empathy via the traditional, structured interview which a lot of people try in their workspaces. Now interviews are fine, for certain things, they're a good tool to use, but you cannot use them to develop empathy. You need to use active listening. Active listening, keyword, you may find a lot of it out there. And again that everyday level of conversation that we're having is staying at that surface level. So you have to go a little deeper; that's what active listening is about. So, instead of calling them interviews—I'm not using that word because I want to really differentiate them from what an interview is

as a tool—I'm calling them listening sessions. And a listening session is active listening, plain and simple. And it's all about letting the person take you where that person thinks is important, what goes through their head, in the direction and path that is important to them. It's just like going on a tour in a foreign city. How many people have gone on a tour, with a little guide? You walk around, the guide tells you about some stuff about this place and the people there. And then you walk around to the next place and do the same thing. Even though you have this burning passion about church architecture you don't interrupt and ask about the church down the street. You don't, in a listening session, interrupt the person who's guiding you through their thinking and ask about something that's a burning passion for you at work. You just leave it off the table. There's also no list of questions when you walk in. And if you're doing this with a colleague, clearly, you're not going to come in with a list of questions. You're just going to say, "Hey, you're really interested in doing that project, you keep pushing at it, I need to understand more about what your thinking is, and how you came to this conclusion. So that I can understand it, and maybe support you in these intentions."

surface

opinion, preference, explanation

depth

reasoning

reactions

guiding principles

decision-making

source of opinions

source of preferences

When you get into a listening session—here is the Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi book that you may want to look into—you get into a sense of flow. This is when you don't realize time is passing. You are so intent on listening to that one person, and where they're going.

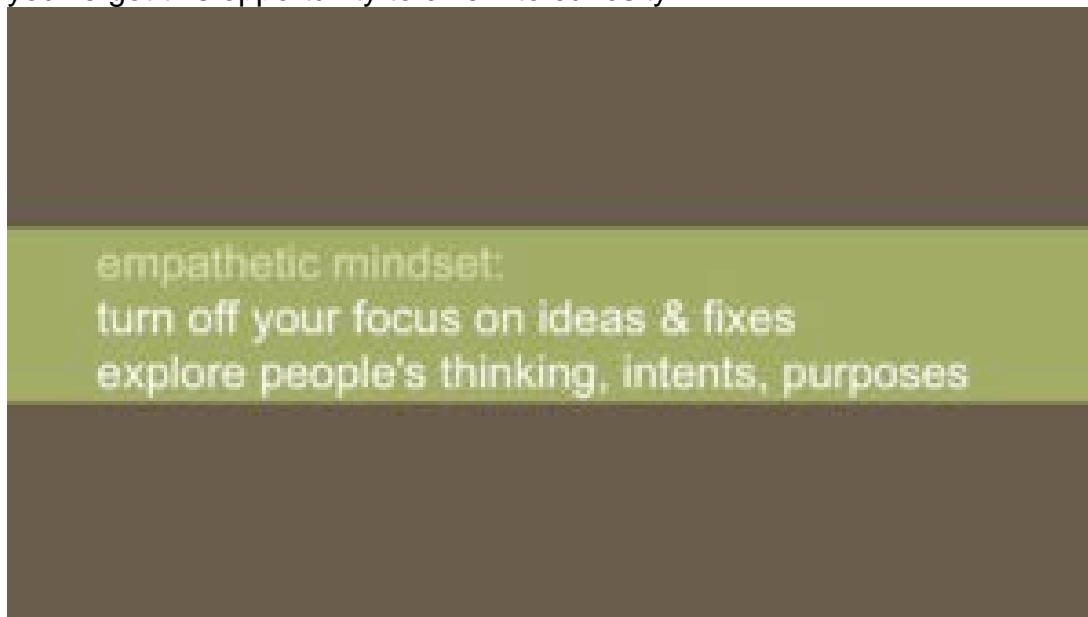


So I want to tell a few little guidelines about a listening session.

- And the first one I stick a toddler up here with the word "Why?" We all know this, right? Toddlers are very good at asking why. But, I'm not putting her up there because of that "Why?" I'm putting her up there because she's not embarrassed about what she doesn't know. She's not embarrassed to ask. She's fine being naive about things, and that's how we need to be during a listening session: fine with being naive. Fine with asking about everything.
- You also, during a listening session, if you're doing this with maybe a potential customer, you want to be aware of when you're making assumptions. And they can be teeny, teeny little things like when that person says, "Oh, and then I look it up." And you're thinking, oh okay, she Googles it on her laptop on her desk. But wait, that's an assumption. Maybe "look it up" means something else to her, and you need to talk to her and find out.
- Another thing is that you don't want to play researcher. A lot of the time, when people are trying to do this kind of work, they're all like "Oh, wow, okay that other person that said that is saying something similar. There's a pattern here." You're analyzing this. If you use your cognitive space for analysis during a listening session, you're not paying attention to that person. You need every brain cell to pay attention. So you really can't think about what this is doing for your organization, or what this is doing for your work, or how it relates to the other people you're talking to. This is super important.
- This is also a time when you need to let go of your need to demonstrate your worth. Ever since we were kids in school we were taught, hey, you have to show how good you are on the spelling test. You have to show how good you are by getting a graduate certificate. You have to show how good you are in a job interview. When you're around the table with your teammates you have to show your contribution. "Yeah, I'm here as a teammate. I'm making things better. We're all making things better together. Look at what we're doing!" But when you're listening to someone, when you're in an active listening session, you set all of that aside. And that's sometimes kind of hard to do, even

for people who are professors and talk about it all the time and do it all the time. This is something you're constantly teaching yourself. It's like, "Hey, I'm here with this person, I know nothing about the way their brain works, and I don't want to insert any of myself in there."

- You also, along the same lines, don't ever want to correct them. If they say something, their model of the world got built up for a reason, and that's your chance to dive into it and see how they built it up. What was their thinking behind that? This is a great opportunity to just dive in. And don't even correct them afterwards. Don't offer suggestions, because just the act of doing that is establishing your expertise and you want to set that aside.
- Along the same lines, emotional reactions, even if you don't agree, they're valid. I ran into this a lot when I was working with the folks in the airline. "Oh, she shouldn't be so upset, just because her flight got delayed." It's like, no, you have to embrace that, you have to accept it. It's real.
- Speaking of emotions, your own reactions are going to crop up when you're listening to someone. And it's good to recognize them, and acknowledge them and then also set them aside so that you can then go into curiosity. The photographer here is from Oakland and actually talked to this guy about the rats and why he carries them around, and had all of these amazing stories to tell about the rats. It's another point where you've got this opportunity to dive into curiosity.



So, the empathetic mindset is all about stopping, for a moment, your need to solve problems, to make ideas, to make things better. Because we all want to make things better. When you're in this little mindset, that's not what you're doing. All that you want to do is explore other people's thinking, other people's reactions, other people's intents and purposes. Just for a moment gather that information. And then you can go back to your ideas and solving problems. But if you do this over and over again, if you do this continually for the rest of your lives, you will fill your brain with so much more material. And as any good thing that's enjoyable to see and do, like musicians and athletes, you

have to practice. And a good way to practice active listening is in your everyday life. If you're in line somewhere (this is actually the casual commuter carpool line down near the Grand Lake Theater), your line at the grocery store or maybe when you're in the locker room, or when you're out walking the dog. Anytime you're around strangers take the chance, say something to them, like "Oh, nice shirt," and see what they have to say, and see if you can get into some sort of active listening session. If you practice this, and you need to be in the right mood to practice this, if you're standing in the line and you've just had the worst day in your life, it's probably not such a good day to practice. But if you practice this when you are in a good mood, and as many times a week as you can then when opportunities arise, you will feel so confident in a listening session.