

Empathy

By Paul Francois & Enrique Garcia

Empathy is essential for developing rapport. Empathy is commonly defined as understanding what another person is saying and feeling and communicating that understanding back to them. Empathy means several things:

- The ability to **share** in another's emotions or feelings and **grasp** the emotional **content** of what the person is saying, without pity or sympathy.
- Effectively communicate that understanding **back** to them to establish **rapport**.
- **Reflect** back the emotional **content** of what you just heard in understanding tones.

For example, if you are talking to a subject who is describing the aggravation of driving to and from work in heavy traffic, you might respond by saying something like, "That must be very frustrating." In this brief response, you are letting the subject know that you are listening intently to what he is saying and grasping the emotional content behind his words. This is infinitely more effective than saying something like, "I understand" or "That's nothing to get upset about." In this manner, the interviewer is expressing tolerance and possibly even outright rejection of the speaker's point of view.

According to Stephanie Palmer in her book, *Good In A Room*:

"The keys to being likable are to be emphatic and interested. Empathy means that you care. You can step into the other person's shoes, understand her feelings, and share her perspective. Interest means that you're curious about her; you want to get to know her better. If it is clear to the other person that you care about her and that you are intrigued by her, she will want to spend time with you and will have an easier time trusting you."

Points to Remember

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey suggests that we should "Seek first to **understand**, and *then* to be **understood**." Most people prefer to express their own point of view **first** and to talk about **themselves**. Listening first to the other person requires patience and discipline on the part of the interviewer.

The opposite of talking is LISTENING – listening to another's side **first** is **difficult**. Just as we describe in the 3 Day Interview and Interrogation class, an effective listener also **observes** the speaker's response.

You can empathize and grasp a subject's emotional content without compromising your position, values, or beliefs. When you disagree, maintain a calm, non-judgmental tone of voice.

When we communicate, we tend to **filter** what people tell us through our own lens or paradigm. Listen with the **intent** to UNDERSTAND. This is why the interview comes **before** the interrogation. We are first trying to gather information without confrontation or accusation. Someone is **more likely to listen** to our point of view **after** we have given our **undivided** attention to theirs.

Remember, there is no better way to establish rapport during the interview phase than effectively empathizing with your subject.

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