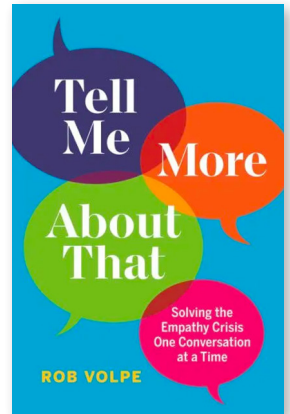


Tell Me More About That

Solving the Empathy Crisis One Conversation at a Time

by **Rob Volpe**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Everyone is born empathetic, but it is the combination of genetics, parenting, and lived experiences that help one develop a strong ability for cognitive empathy. This strong gift of cognitive empathy allows Rob Volpe the ability to see from another person's perspective, walk a mile in their shoes, and provided the perfect foundation for his book, *Tell Me More About That: Solving the Empathy Crisis One Conversation at a Time*.

With empathy becoming a new catchphrase in leadership, this book provides the fundamental outline on the five steps to empathy that every person in leadership needs to conquer – dismantling judgment, asking good questions, actively listening, integration of understanding, and using solution imagination.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to identify empathy, even when it eludes you as a leader.
- Why it is important to identify empathetic scenarios and change perspective.
- How to utilize the five steps to that every leader needs to conquer.
- Why empathy as a leader is more important than the product or service you provide.
- The solutions necessary to move forward in an empathy-empowered environment.

Introduction

With a focus on empathy today, this book empowers leaders to gain the first-hand insight necessary to overcome the digital technology dominated society and create success that is not determined by the product but by the leader's ability to be efficient in operations. To truly succeed and stand out in the crowd, leaders need to be able to respond to the needs, wants, and desires of their customers, employees, and fellow leaders.

No matter what our role is, we encounter millions of people in our lives. As a leader, you may encounter some more than others. Having an empathetic character can go hand-in-hand with expanding your operations and creating an environment that flourishes. Using empathy and storytelling, you are able to connect with people and understand where they are coming from.

Everyone has a unique worldview that is made up of individual factors creating their perspective – empathizing allows you to tap into this and connect on a level that doesn't exist otherwise.

Right now, the US is suffering from a shortage of empathy skills as a whole, determined by a University of Michigan Institute for Social Research study. When there is a lack of empathy, it generates tensions and the breakdown results in an empathy crisis. Leaders, to be effective in their roles, must learn the proper ways to overcome the crisis and instill the right empathetic practices within their organization.

Part One: When Empathy Eludes Us

It's Like Christmas Morning

Meeting people and learning from their stories is one way to help build the "empathy muscle," which has spent years atrophying due to lack of use. Thinking about it and approaching it from the Christmas morning perspective can change the way we think about empathy as a whole. Everyone loves Christmas morning – mainly the presents. When you approach the day as an opportunity to receive a new gift, it changes the perspective. Each story, each recollection of how others have been treated poorly by their peers is an opportunity to build upon the empathetic character you want to create.

Getting to know and listen to others is a gift, one that you can use toward good or one you can just store away in a vault. Think about your own story – have you felt misunderstood by others? How did that make you feel? Reflecting

on your own personal encounters can help you determine where to focus your empathy training.

The Hazards Of The Job

The biggest mistake most people make is confusing sympathy for empathy. Empathy is a powerful tool that requires you to connect with someone and their experience, whereas sympathy results your having feelings for someone and their situation – two completely different sides of the spectrum. We often don't realize that this happens until we are in the middle of it. Judgment pushes us into bring more sympathetic than empathizing (truly connecting) with the situation. Being sympathetic instead of empathetic in the workplace can be a leadership landmine.

When confronted with situations that are uncomfortable – how did you approach it? Taking a look at how you approach various situations in your role (whether sympathetic or empathetic) can help you nurture the right environment and create real connections based on a more general understanding.

Turning Perspective Around

Although many of us have the same viewpoint, the points of view we have are different. There are two perspectives to every conversation and experience. Think of it as listening with your eyes, although the view is the same, we are processing it differently.

Our brain is processing the view based on our past experiences and often our own bias. We have to create the connections that help us see things from the other perspective. Effective leadership requires the ability to take the current perspective you might have and view it from the perspective of someone else.

Part Two: Following The 5 Steps To Empathy

Defining The 5 Steps To Empathy

Mastering the five steps of empathy does not require taking the first step, mastering it, and building upon it with the subsequent step. Instead, it is situational. You may need to use one step more than another in any given situation – the goal is to determine which step is necessary at any given time.

The steps to consider include dismantling judgment, asking good questions, actively listening, integrating what you hear into real understanding, and using that to create a solution based on imagination.

Step 1: Dismantle Judgement

Dismantling judgment is the hardest step of empathy. Judgment is second nature within society, and we use it as a measure of protecting ourselves, which only sabotages making a true connection. Think of judgment as a “frenemy.” We need to use judgment to make decisions in our lives (friend), but when we find ourselves being judgmental, that perverts us from getting to the empathy we need to connect. To properly combat this, we have to stop and evaluate how we come across. Are we using judgment to make a decision or to build a wall between ourselves and others? Understanding what prompts the wrong kind of judgment can create pathways for empathy, which are expressed in the scenarios throughout the next four chapters and how to rethink perspective – The Moldy Pancake, Crawling Away, Mother Would Never Do That, and Fear.

Step 2: Ask Good Questions

Context is everything in building up empathy. A good question is one that is open-ended and exploratory. There is no judgment in it and good questions produce good answers that you can build a connection over. How much context do you get from “yes” and “no”? Think back to all the recent conversations you have had – were questions asked? Were they good questions? Implementing the word “why” can change the direction of the answer you receive from your question.

Instead of relying solely on the word “why,” implementing who, what, when, where, and how, can uncover more emphasis on the situation and create a better understanding of the answer. Using the next two chapters provide context and understanding as to why asking good questions bring about results.

Step 3: Active Listening

It is not enough to ask the questions, if you aren’t going to listen to the answers. Without listening, it is impossible to achieve any level of empathy. Listening is more than just the sounds – it is everything we hear, see, touch, smell, taste, and sense. The intuit we gather become data points and stimuli that are then processed and synthesized into meaning for that very moment. When we are present and pay attention, we pick up on transmitted signals – the true definition of active listening.

Using active listening skills make us present in the moment – when present we pick up on the verbal and non-verbal cues being given to us. Look back at the situations you have been in – what did you miss when you weren’t paying atten-

tion to what wasn’t being said. Over the next few chapters, the scenarios presented create a better understanding of how being active and present in the conversation can change the entire outcome – an empathetic one.

Step 4: Integrate Into Understanding

Step four is where things really start to come together. Pushing aside your own perspective to welcome someone else’s doesn’t mean you abandon yours – only that you are accommodating someone else. For example, you can prefer chocolate ice cream, but at the same time acknowledge that vanilla might be preferable to others. It doesn’t mean that you abandon your bowl of chocolate, you just make room at the table for someone enjoying a bowl of vanilla. You are entitled to your opinion, others are entitled to theirs – but when you remove the judgment that only your opinion matters, you can begin seeing the true reflection of the other person’s point of view.

Have you tried sharing your feelings but holding your preference to accommodate the ones of others? The next couple of chapters will explore how altering your perspective and changing your language can help you integrate more of an understanding.

Step 5: Use Solution Imagination

Step five is the moment you have been working toward with steps one through four. Your training has brought you to the moment where you step into someone else’s shoes – the entire meaning of empathy. To do this, you have to take off your own shoes and say, “I can see your point of view; tell me more about that?” At this time you have to push back the clouds of judgment that may come rolling in, obscuring your ability to truly see.

Using the right solution imagination, you can begin creating change and promoting empathy by literally putting yourself in their shoes. The scenarios of life experiences in the next three chapters will show you just how important it is to truly get into someone else’s perspective.

Part Three: Embracing Empathy In Everyday Life

A Work In Progress

An empathetic approach is also useful when trying to achieve forgiveness. Taking past traumas or childhood experiences that shaped us and looking at it from the other

perspective can change how we approach specific situations. Maybe the one doing the bullying in your life was bullied in their own home – which you might not see if you weren't looking at it from their perspective. It does not condone the experience you went through, but it can help you create your own type of closure by putting yourself in their shoes.

The best part? The five steps of empathy can be used in your everyday life and in any situation where you must interact with another person. Empathy is important and it increases the quality of the relationships in your life – whether work, leadership, or everyday encounters.

Conclusion

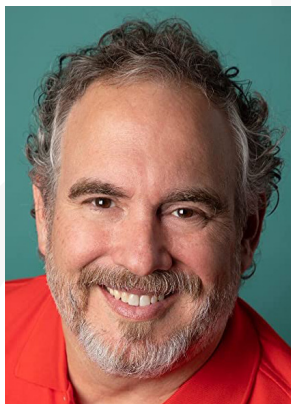
Empathy is a touchy subject for most, but it is a crucial skill to master when working in a leadership role. Misunderstood employees leave – understood and empathized ones join your mission to excel your business.

Through the viewpoints expressed within this book, you can begin to put yourself in the shoes of someone else within your organization – or even your daily life. Empathy is not something we are all experts at, but with the right amount of work, we can pursue expert status.

With the five steps of empathy, mastery is within reach. Making sure to keep judgmental opinions and thoughts at bay can help you begin asking questions and step inside of someone's shoes. Just because an opinion is different than yours, doesn't mean that it isn't valid to someone else. Being able to acknowledge and ask questions about a viewpoint

different from your own can allow you to truly see where the other person is coming from.

As a leader, this perspective can change how efficient you are in that role. Using empathy, in a world where empathy has declined, can change how others perceive you and how you perceive others – a chance at true success in life and in the organization.



Rob Volpe is an astute observer of life and a master storyteller who brings empathy and compassion to the human experience. As CEO of Ignite 360, he leads a team of insights, strategy, and creative professionals serving the world's leading brands across a range of industries. As a thought leader in the role of empathy in marketing and the workplace, Rob frequently speaks on the topic at conferences, corporations, and college classes. He is a graduate of Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and lives in San Francisco with his husband and three cats.

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