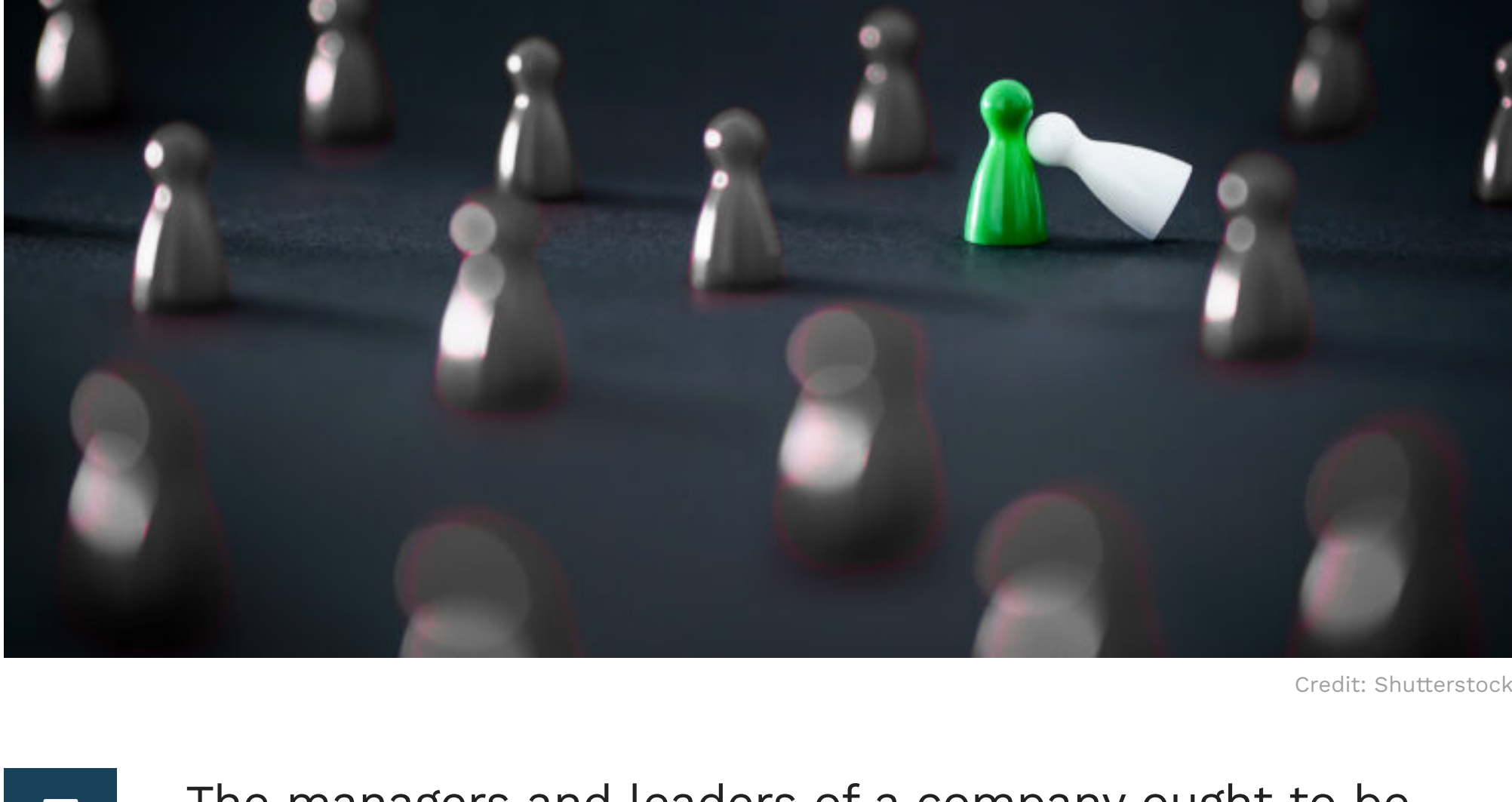


Empathy in the Workplace: Why it matters more than ever

by The Editorial Team — September 6, 2021 in Maritime Knowledge, Mental



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The managers and leaders of a company ought to be capable of moving their organization forward during challenging times. To do that, they must look beyond traditional strategies for management development, in order to cultivate the skills most important for success. One of those skills, which during the pandemic has emerged to be very important, is empathy.

What is empathy

Empathy is the ability to perceive and relate to the thoughts, emotions, or experiences of others. People with high levels of empathy are excellent at understanding a situation from another person's perspective, thus reacting with compassion. In the workplace, this means that coworkers are able to establish true, empathetic connections with one another, enhancing relationships and performance.

As for empathy in leadership, it means that a person has the ability to understand the needs of others, and be aware of their feelings and thoughts. However, despite the importance of this skill, it has been overlooked as a performance indicator. Nonetheless, researchers have found out that successful leaders must be more “person-focused” and able to work well with people from different teams, departments, countries, cultures, and backgrounds.

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In fact, a recent study by the Center for Creative Leadership, found that empathy in the workplace is positively related to job performance. Namely, managers who practice empathetic leadership toward direct reports are viewed as better performers in their job by their bosses.

These results showcase that the ability to demonstrate empathy in the workplace is a key part of emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness. Moreover, it also improves human interactions in general and can lead to more effective communication and positive outcomes, in both work and home settings.

How to show empathy in the workplace

More and more employees, human resources professionals and CEOs now view their organization as more empathetic this year, in comparison to 2020. In fact, according to the Businessolver's 2021 State of Workplace Empathy study, about 72% of employees believe their organizations are empathetic, saying also the same for their CEOs.

However, despite the encouraging results, there is still an empathy gap between CEOs and employees. Namely, views on company empathy are more than 20% higher among CEOs than employees. This means that employees feel the most empathy from their colleagues and managers, while CEOs, the company as a whole and HR received lower ratings.

As for Gen Z workers specifically, their ratings of their company's empathy were down, falling 14% in comparison to last year. On the other hand, there is common ground between the employees and the CEOs, and that has to do with motivation. As a matter of fact, the aforementioned report indicates that around 84% of CEOs believe that empathy leads to better business outcomes, while 72% of employees said it drives worker motivation.

Nevertheless, displaying empathy in the workplace can take many shapes and forms. The important thing to remember is that empathy can be learned. If given enough time and support, leaders can develop and enhance their empathy skills through coaching, training, or developmental opportunities and initiatives:

1. Be careful for signs of overwork in others

Work burnout is a real problem, and it becomes much more of a problem during times of intense stress and pressure. It is no secret that many people are stressed, putting in more work hours than ever before and finding it difficult to separate work and home life.

This is where managers who are skilled at empathetic leadership come to the rescue. Such managers are able to recognize signs of overwork in others before burnout becomes an issue that results in disengagement or turnover. This can be done by as simple as taking a few extra minutes each week to check in with team members, in order to learn how they are handling their current workload and help them to recover from overwork.

2. Show sincere interest towards other people

In order to lead with empathy, a good manager must work to understand the unique needs and goals of each team member and how to best match work assignments to contribute to both performance and employee satisfaction. In fact, team members who see that their manager recognizes them in this way are more engaged and willing to go the extra mile.

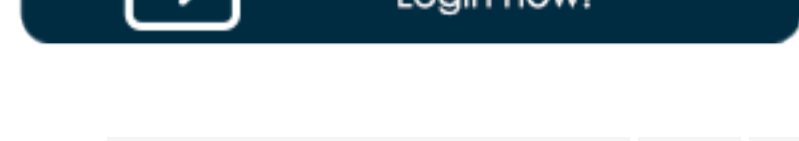
3. Demonstrate a willingness to help

As said before, lines between work and personal life are becoming more and more blurred nowadays. The task of an empathetic manager is to understand that their team members are dynamic individuals who carry their own personal problems, while at the same time they have to maintain their professional responsibilities. These managers recognize that it is part of their role to lead and support those team members when they need it most.

For this reason, keeping open lines of communication and encouraging transparency is always a good way to improve psychological safety and help team members feel comfortable sharing when it is necessary.

4. Show compassion

They say that real connections and friendships are created during tough times. This is true, and having good friends at work matters. This is something an empathetic manager has acknowledged, and is using it as a tool to form bonds with their team members. This is especially important during the most difficult of times, such as loss. While someone cannot always relate 100% to the specific loss of a team member, they can always act empathetically and let them know they have support if they need it.



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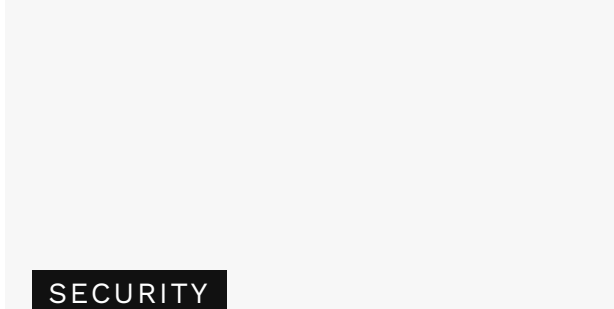
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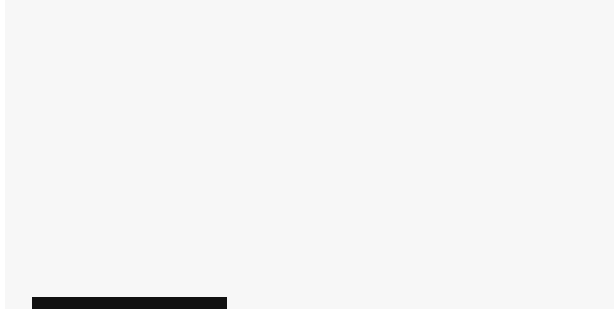
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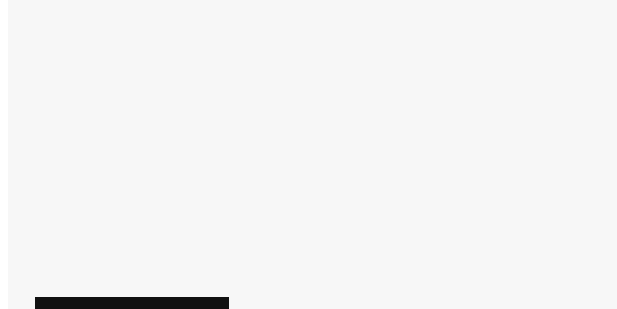
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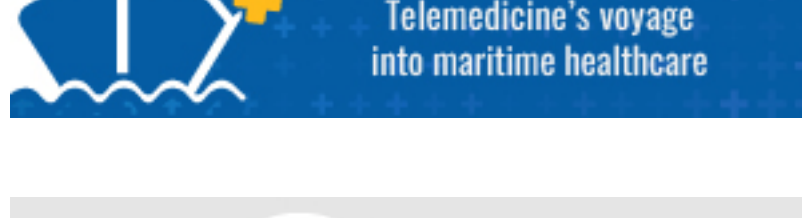
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