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Module 6

EMPATHY : A CRITICAL SKILL FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERS

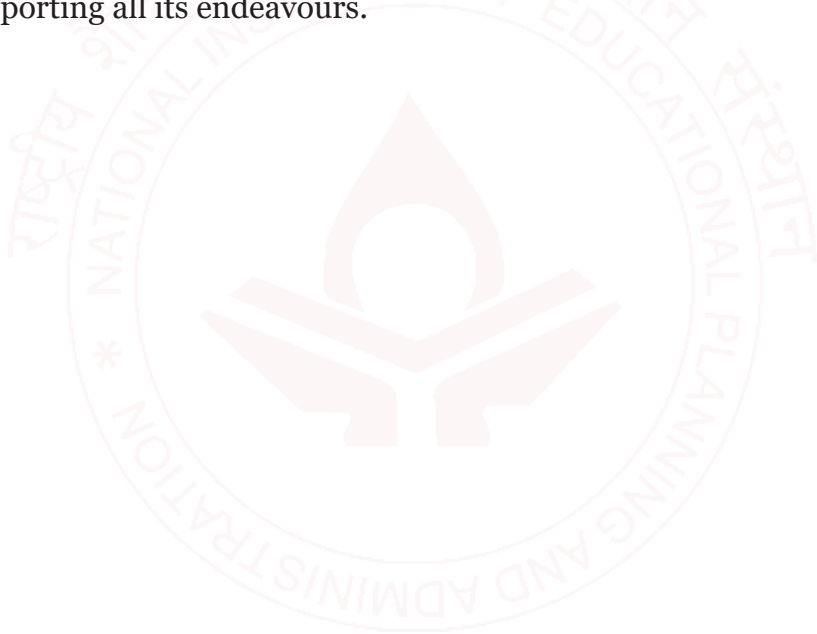
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**KEY AREA
DEVELOPING SELF**

**EMPATHY : A CRITICAL SKILL
FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OF SCHOOL LEADERS**

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Introduction

Empathy is a construct that is fundamental to leadership. Many leadership theories suggest that the ability to have and display empathy is an important part of leadership. To improve their performance and effectiveness, leaders may need to develop the capability to demonstrate empathy. Recognising the significance of empathy in developing the interpersonal relationships, the present module highlights that school leaders, as professionals, need to create a conducive, democratic and fear-free culture by having empathy towards people working with him/her as well as the students. In this module, we will discuss the meaning and practice of empathy by the school head towards his/her teachers and students. The module is structured as follows:

Section I of the module deals with the definition of empathy. It also highlights significance of empathy in establishing positive relationship with other stakeholders. Section II describes different types of empathy and how school leaders decide which kind is the most suitable in a particular situation. Section III focuses on the attributes required for developing empathy. Section IV assesses your empathetic attitude through a questionnaire.





Learning Outcomes

On completion of the module, school leaders will be able to

- Understand the meaning and significance of empathy so as to build and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders
- Differentiate between types of empathy and their use in particular situations
- Understand the attributes and attitudes needed to create a culture of empathy in school

Sections	Topic
Section 1	Empathy: Key to Relating with other Stakeholders
Section 2	Different Types of Empathy for Creating a Friendly Environment in School
Section 3	Action Steps for Developing Empathy: Role of School Leader to Create a Culture of Empathy
Section 4	Assess Your Empathetic Attitude through a Questionnaire



SECTION 1

EMPATHY: KEY TO RELATING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Learning Objective: School leaders will be able to understand the concept of ‘Empathy’ and its significance while dealing with fellow colleagues and students.

Key Words: Empathy; School leader

Introduction

A key element in interpersonal relationships is empathy as it helps to establish cordial and pleasant relations with the staff and students. Empathy is the ability to understand and comprehend emotions, experience, perspective, feelings and behaviour of another person. Daniel Goleman (1996, 1999) observes that empathy is a necessary component of emotional intelligence and basically the ability to understand others' emotions. It is commonly described as the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes. Tim Minchin noted that empathy is a skill that can be developed and, as with most interpersonal skills comes naturally to most people. The issue is: Is empathy a process of emotion only or is it also a process of thinking? The answer is: It is both. We need to apply reasoning ability to understand another person's thoughts, feelings, reactions and concerns. We need to analyse the problems, issues and situations that the individual is facing. Then we need the emotional capacity to care for that individual's concern. As a professional, you may provide the necessary support which you would find is most appropriate but it does not mean that you would always agree with the person. School leaders need to be empathetic to teachers and students to enable them to perform in a comfortable atmosphere.

Why School Leaders Need to Develop Empathy?

Cooper and Sawaf (1997:51) observe that leadership is a relationship and “emotional relationships are the lifeblood of any profession.” Through case studies they showed that the ability to extend empathy was the most prominent difference between successful and unsuccessful leaders. Cooper and Sawaf (1997: 48) stress the importance of “leading with empathy.” Now the question is: What benefits school leaders have if they possess an empathetic attitude towards other stakeholders which include teachers, students, parents and community? Significant benefits of expressing empathy by school leaders are as below:

- Empathy allows leaders to build and develop relationships with those they lead.
- Empathy helps you to understand the problems and issues of people you are interacting with. Thus, you can reach to the people you are dealing with everyday.
- Empathy will help you build a team and achieve targets. Being empathetic allows leaders to help staff improve and provide them with tangible solutions to the areas where improvement is required.
- Empathy allows you to create an environment of open communication and more effective feedback.

The school leader needs to be empathetic but careful as well. The staff must not be allowed to take advantage of the empathetic leader. The leader must have the skill and ability to understand the reality and must judge the situation objectively and act accordingly. For example, while supporting a staff who has been appointed recently, care needs to be taken that the leader does not become over-protective or biased.

Having learnt about the significance of empathy for school leaders, let us now discuss different kinds of empathy as school leaders need to differentiate about the behaviour he/she must demonstrate in different kind of situations.

Need for Culture of Empathy in Schools

Rohit, a VIII standard student, was drowning in the swimming pool of the school and four students watched him drowning. Instead of helping him, the other students started making mockery of him and laughed that he did not know swimming. Luckily, the trainer reached there and saved Rohit.

Tanvi, a VI standard student, stammers while speaking. Children laugh at her which irritates her and she is not able to concentrate in the classroom. Teacher also thinks that she is a dull student and never gets engaged with her in conversation.

Shobhit is a very punctual and regular teacher. Recently his father had a heart stroke and was admitted to a hospital. He is in-charge for science exhibition. He requested Ms Shobha, the Principal of the school, that this task be given to some other teacher. But she did not agree.

What do these situations tell us? The school does not have a culture which inculcates empathetic behaviour. Lack of empathy leads to a number of problems in the school environment like bullying, prejudices, insensitivity, and thereby it does impact the learning culture of the school.

Let us watch a video clip and reflect on the content discussed:



Source: https://www.ted.com/talks/pat_dolan_time_to_take_empathy_education_in_secondary_schools_seriously



Reflective Questions

1. What insights do you gain from the video?
2. Do you experience similar kind of situations in your school? Give some examples.
3. How would you deal with the situation? Suggest some action points.
4. Can you think of different ways to create empathetic culture in your school? Elaborate.

Let us sum up

In the context of schools, empathy is a significant concept which allows leaders to develop personal relationships with students and fellow colleagues. Empathetic school leaders can understand the problems and issues faced by students, parents and their fellow colleagues.





SECTION 2

DIFFERENT TYPES OF EMPATHY FOR CREATING A FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL

Learning Objective: School leaders will be able to understand different ways to respond to another person's feelings.

Key Words: Types of empathy; Emotional empathy; Cognitive empathy; Compassionate empathy

Introduction

You must have noticed that individuals respond differently to the same situation as they perceive the same event/ situation differently. This arises from the fact that each person has a set of personal characteristics or traits and a particular worldview.

Types of Empathy

Psychologist Mark Davis (2006) categorises three types of empathy.

Emotional Empathy

This is the ability to physically feel what another person feels. It is the ability to feel others' emotions quickly without thinking deeply. If a personal tragedy like disease of the spouse of a colleague occurs, emotional empathy is needed. One has to understand the emotional turmoil your colleague is facing. At the same time, the school leaders must not be overwhelmed by those feelings and lose balance between personal and professional self. Too much emotion or feeling can be unhelpful.

Cognitive Empathy

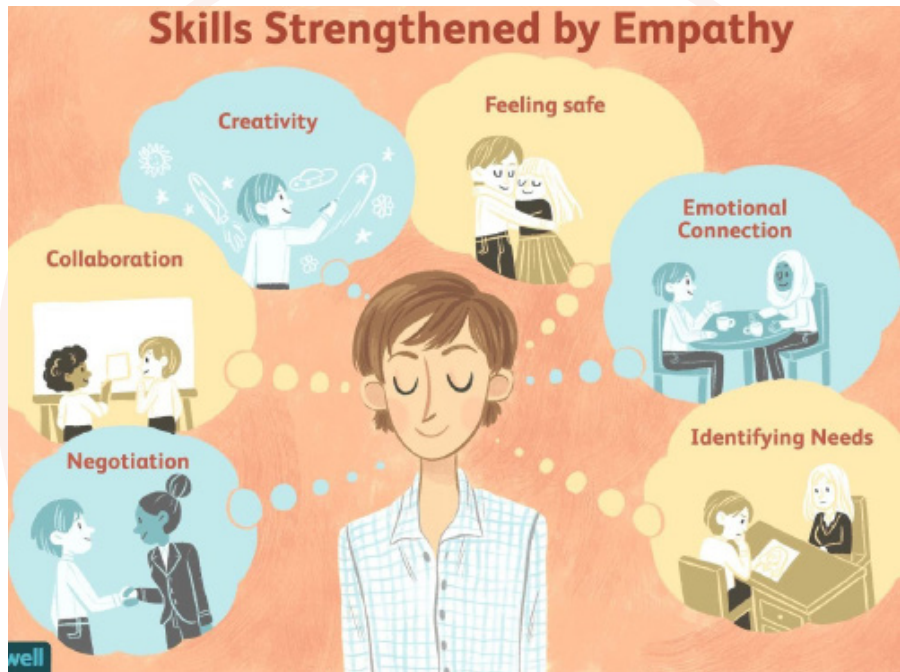
This is the ability to understand another person's perspective. It simply means how the other person feels and what they might be thinking. Cognitive empathy makes us better communicators, because it helps us relay information in a way that best reaches the other person. The leaders tend to think about their feelings rather than feel them directly. You understand how and why a person thinks about certain things. For example, how a staff member would feel if s/he gets suspension order or gets transferred to the place where s/he does not want to go. Cognitive empathy helps the school leader to have a larger perspective on the issue and resolve it.

Compassionate Empathy

Compassionate empathy is feeling someone's pain and taking action to help. The term compassionate empathy is consistent with what we usually understand by compassion. Like empathy, compassion is about feeling concern for someone, but with an additional move towards action to mitigate the problem. Compassionate empathy is the type of empathy that is usually most appropriate. As a general rule, people who want or need your empathy do not just need you to understand (cognitive empathy), and they certainly do not need you to feel their pain or, worse, to burst into tears alongside them (emotional empathy). Instead, they need you to understand and empathise with what they are going through and, crucially, help them to take action to resolve the problem.

In exercising compassionate empathy, we can find the right balance between logic and emotion. We can feel another person's pain, as if it were happening to us, and therefore express the appropriate amount of sympathy. At the same time, we can also remain in control of our own emotions, and apply reason to the situation. This means that we can make better decisions and provide appropriate support to them when and where it is necessary.

Fortunately, empathy is not a fixed trait. It can be learned (Shapiro, 2002). If given enough time and support, leaders can develop and enhance their empathy skills through coaching, training, or developmental opportunities and initiatives. Organisations can encourage a more empathetic work place and help managers improve their empathy skills in a number of ways.



Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/cognitive-and-emotional-empathy-4582389>

Empathetic leaders follow the “2 Ears – 1 Mouth” rule: they spend more time listening than talking. A leader who is empathetic focusses on the person who is speaking. Today, there are so many distractions around us; it can significantly impact the quality of our listening skills. Empathetic leaders put away their smart phones and close their e-mail inbox when listening, so that all of their attention is on the speaker in front of them. Empathetic leaders are also non-judgemental even when feelings of others are in direct disagreement with their own feelings. They appreciate what the other person is feeling and understand how those feelings are affecting that person’s perception, without passing judgement whether those feelings are right or wrong.

Lastly, empathetic leaders are emotionally intelligent. They are able to step back from their own and the other person's feelings and analyse those feelings in a subjective manner. Empathetic leaders do not let the feelings involved in the situation control the outcome.

Key Requirements of being a Leader with Empathy

- If you want to have the respect and loyalty of your teachers and students, then you need to demonstrate empathy by action.
- Show your concern.
- Be careful about your gestures and body language.
- Your nonverbal communication like listening carefully and not doing any other work during the conversation will speak volumes of your concern. Try to respond in between the discussion to show that you are listening carefully.
- Appreciate the work.
- If any of your teachers or students have achieved any laurels, appreciate them. For example, if a teacher has completed any further course or has been recognised by the National or State body or has tried a new experiment, then appreciate or present them with flowers, etc.
- Listen without judgement.
- Trust people as being important.

Let us sum up

Having understanding of different ways of responding to another persons's feelings can be gained through different types of empathy i.e emotional, cognitive and compassionate empathy. Through the understanding of different types of empathy, school leaders can gain ability of feeling physically what the other person feels and can understand other persons' perspective. Through understanding compassionate empathy, one can be empathetic as well as move towards taking action for solving the problem. Also we learned that empathetic leaders are emotionally intelligent. Some of the requirements of being an empathetic leader are showing concern, listening without judgement and appreciating work.



SECTION 3

ACTION STEPS FOR DEVELOPING EMPATHY: ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADER TO CREATE A CULTURE OF EMPATHY

Learning Objective: School leaders will be able to understand action steps to create a culture of Empathy

Key Words: Culture of empathy; Model empathy

Introduction

One role school leader can play is of helping students to expand their circle of concern. People are inclined to feel more empathy for those who are similar to them or in close proximity to them. But when it comes to building a school community and developing caring students, that may not be enough. In strong school communities, students (and adults) have empathy for everyone – including those who are different in backgrounds, beliefs, or other ways. When school leaders show that they care about everyone in the school community and expect students to do the same, it can help students open their eyes and ears to others, including those who are sometimes treated as invisible.

Another important role is of encouraging students to take the leap from expressing empathy to acting on it. Too often, we assume that young people will automatically know what to do when they feel concern for a peer or an adult, and then do it. But we all sometimes fall into the empathy-action gap, when we care about a person or cause but do not do anything to help. School leaders can help people overcome this gap by modelling and encouraging their self and others to take action, whether it is standing up for someone who is teased, helping to solve a problem, or simply listening to someone who is feeling down.

Read the excerpt below to know and internalize how to model and practice empathy in schools:

The Five Essential Steps for Developing Empathy in Schools

1. Model Empathy

- When frustrated with a student or teacher, critically analyse the situation, reflect and try to see their perspective before responding.
- When a student or teacher is upset and behaving differently, try to understand the reasons behind it. Try to talk to the student than immediately reprimanding her.
- Ask for students' input when appropriate and feasible (for example, when establishing classroom rules or generating ideas for group projects), and actively listen. Find opportunities to incorporate their feedback and respond to their needs.

2. Teach What Empathy is and why it Matters

- Clearly explain that empathy means understanding and caring about another person's feelings and taking action to help. Explain how it improves the classroom and school community.
- Stress the importance of noticing and having empathy for people beyond immediate friends, including those who are different or who are too often invisible.
- Give examples of how to act on empathy, such as helping, showing kindness, or even simply listening.

3. Practice

- Create opportunities to practice taking another person's perspective and imagining what others are thinking. Play charades and do role plays, read and discuss books, and use "what would you do" style vignettes or case studies.
- Name the barriers to empathy, like stereotypes, stress, or fears of social consequences for helping an unpopular peer. Share specific strategies to overcome them. For example, encourage students to personally help with kind and supportive words to a student who was bullied.

- Foster emotional and social skills, like dealing with anger and frustration and solving conflicts. Use an evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programme and teach specific routines for calming down and resolving disputes. Use advisories and guidance counselling to develop social and ethical skills.

4. **Set Clear Ethical Expectations**

- Be clear that you expect students to care about one another and the entire school community. Talk about it, model it, praise it, and hold students to it.
- Do an exercise with students to help them reflect on who is inside and outside their circle. Discuss why and how they can expand the circle of who they care about.
- Establish specific guidelines for unacceptable language and behaviours. Ban slurs or hurtful language like “that’s retarded” or “he’s so stupid,” even when said ironically or in humour – and step in if you hear them. Encourage students to think about why these words can be hurtful.
- Enlist students in establishing rules and holding each other accountable.
- Use peer mediation Practices when conflicts arise.

5. **Make School Culture and Climate a Priority**

- Collect data from students and staff at least once a year about whether they feel safe, respected, and cared about at school.
- Take time to examine the data and make efforts to address problem areas identified by students and staff.
- Avoid over-emphasising comparative evaluation, getting ahead by beating others, or other pressures that can erode trust and undermine empathy.

Source - <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/how-build-empathy-strengthen-school-community>

Case Study 1:

Empathetic Attitude of a School Leader towards Children with Special Needs

Mr. Ramesh, the Principal of Senior Secondary School, was loved by the teaching staff. He was also an effective instructional leader. The entire faculty met every other week, and the academic teams met for an hour once a week after school and daily for 20 minutes during their collaborative planning time.

Mr. Ramesh was committed to the idea that the only way to solve the school's problems was through teamwork and teacher input, and he worked hard to provide planning time for teachers so they could collaborate. The principle of team work was evident when Mr Ramesh discussed where the new student, Mohan, would be placed and what kind of support services the teacher would need to help this challenging student as he was suffering from behavioural disorder. The teachers decided that Mr. Shyam would be the best teacher for Mohan, because of his low-key, non-confrontational manner and his good rapport with students. The group also recognised that unless they were going to simply wait for Mohan to break the school's rules and then expel him as the last school had done, they would need support from many different sources. This would include the school counsellor who would meet with Mohan regularly to track his adjustment to school; the special education teacher, because Mohan was identified as BD (behaviour disorder), which made him eligible for special education services; and possibly tutors, because his records indicated that he was well below grade level in all academic areas. Mr. Ramesh also wanted to keep in close contact with Mohan's family and had already scheduled a meeting with his Parents. The teachers left the meeting feeling better about the prospect of the new student, but

they patted Mr. Shyam on the back in empathy for what they anticipated as a difficult assignment.

The case study of Mohan provides an analysis of how a school leader can be empathetic in approach in order to solve a specific student problem. It also demonstrates how a school leader plays an important role in shaping child's personality.

Let us sum up

This section explains five essential steps for developing empathy in schools which are modelling empathy in front of others, understand what empathy is and why it matters, practicing being empathetic, setting clear ethical expectations and making school culture and climate a priority. The case study exhibits the qualities of an empathetic leader.



SECTION 4

ASSESS YOUR EMPATHETIC ATTITUDE THROUGH A QUESTIONNAIRE

Learning Objective: School heads will be able to assess their empathetic attitudes towards the students and staff.

KeyWords: Empathy; Empathetic attitude

Empathy Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is sourced from a research article that has standardized the test (Sprengh, R. N., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., & Levine, B. (2009). *The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: scale development and initial validation of a factor-analytic solution to multiple empathy measures. Journal of personality assessment, 91(1), 62–71.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802484381>). For further details, you may access the weblink. The following scale has 16 items. You need to tick the option that you find relevant in your case. The option must be the first that comes to your mind spontaneously.

1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
2. Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me much
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
5. I enjoy making other people feel better
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

6. I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
7. When a friend starts to talk about his\her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
8. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
9. I find that I am “in tune” with other people’s moods
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
10. I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
11. I become irritated when someone cries
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
12. I am not really interested in how other people feel
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
13. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

14. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

15. I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

16. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel protective towards him\her

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

Please add your scores according to the numbers assigned below and write it against each item.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
1	0	1	2	3	4	
2	4	3	2	1	0	
3	0	1	2	3	4	
4	4	3	2	1	0	
5	0	1	2	3	4	
6	0	1	2	3	4	
7	4	3	2	1	0	
8	0	1	2	3	4	
9	0	1	2	3	4	
10	4	3	2	1	0	
11	4	3	2	1	0	
12	4	3	2	1	0	
13	0	1	2	3	4	
14	4	3	2	1	0	
15	4	3	2	1	0	
16	0	1	2	3	4	
Total						

Facilitator Sheet for Discussion

Scoring: Item responses are scored according to the following scale for positively worded items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16. The following negatively worded items are reverse scored: 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15. Scores are summed to derive total for the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, et al., 2009).

$$\text{Total} = 32 + 32 = 64$$

This TEQ containing 16 items is a valid and reliable self report measure assessing a wide variety of empathy related behaviours like emotional comprehension in others (Item 8), pro-social helping behaviours (Item 13), altruism (5, 14 and 16), sympathetic physiological arousal (Item 3, 6, 9 and 11), demonstrating appropriate sensitivity (2,7,10, 12 and 15) and two items (1 and 4) targets the perception of an emotional state in another that stimulates the same emotion in one self.

A person can have maximum score of 64 on this TEQ, higher scores indicates that a person is highly empathetic, while low score represents low empathetic attitude.

Let us sum up

As leaders, it is important for us to imagine ourselves in the position of our students, staff and community members. This gives us a better perspective on the challenges and feelings of those we are tasked to serve. Better, more informed decisions can result from “walking in the shoes” of those who will be most impacted by the decisions that we make. Empathetic leadership not only builds trust, but also creates a culture where students want to learn and adults strive to perform their best. Being a successful leader comes with many challenges of self-awareness and understanding of other’s emotions to act reasonably towards incidents and to seek empathy in order to understand other perspectives, which in turn would make teachers valued.

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Additional Reading

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2. Davis Mark (1996): Empathy: A Socio-Psychological Approach

Assessment: Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

- Q1. When one empathises with someone, s(he) tries to understand and comprehend other person's -
- Emotions and Perspective
 - Experience
 - Experience only
 - Perspective only
- Q2. With which type of empathy a person communicates better and relay information in a way that best reaches the other person
- Emotional empathy
 - Cognitive empathy
 - Compassionate empathy
 - Both Emotional and cognitive empathy
- Q3. Significant benefits of having empathy by the school leaders are:
- Empathy helps you to understand the problems and issues of people you are interacting with.
 - Empathy helps to build a team and achieve targets.
 - Being empathetic allows leaders to help staff improve and provide them tangible solutions to the areas where improvement is required.
 - All of the above

Q4. Which of the following is not a key requirement of being a leader with empathy

- a. Appreciate the work.
- b. Be careful about your gestures and body language
- c. Listen with judgement.
- d. Show your concern.

Q.5 If a student feels shy while responding to a question asked to her/him inside classroom, an empathic teacher would

- a. Ask her/him the reason for shyness at that time in front of other students
- b. Make her/him respond by comparing her/him with other student
- c. Try to know the reason for shyness later after the class
- d. Punishes the student

Ans: Q1.-a, Q2.-b, Q3.-a, Q4.-c, Q5.-c





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Series Editors: Rashmi Diwan and Charu Smita Malik

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