



Courageous and Compassionate Empathy Tip Sheet

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

Tip Sheet for Practicing Courageous and Compassionate Empathy

Feeling empathy while staying emotionally stable and present means you use compassion and courage to stay in the conversation when your client is experiencing intense emotions such as sadness, anger, regret, embarrassment, or the fear and doubts that result from uncertainty.

Staying present, compassionate, and believing in your client's ability to understand and grow may feel difficult for you but it is the most powerful demonstration of your coaching. Your presence gives them a sense of being seen and valued even when they are reactive. This builds their courage to stay in the conversation and find a way forward.

You can practice and develop compassionate and courageous empathy your nonreactive empathy in any conversation at work, with family and friends, or out in the world as you might otherwise go about your day with your mind full of random thoughts.

Remind yourself to practice before you engage. Open your head, heart, and gut. Trust you are picking up on something without conscious thought, then before you interpret or attach your own emotions to what you are sensing, remember to apply these five steps:

1. *Notice when emotions arise in your body*— When you feel a point of tension or rumbling in your body, try to discern if you are sensing something your client is feeling or it is your own reaction to what is occurring.
2. *If you aren't sure if you are correctly picking up their energy, tell them what you noticed and ask what it means to them*—For example, you could start by saying, "When you paused and looked away, I sensed sadness or confusion. Would you share what you were experiencing?" or "Every time you talk about your current work team, you get agitated. Is there something about your relationship with them you would be willing to explore?" If you offer an emotion you think they might be feeling, be sure to ask them to confirm, further explain, or share what they think they are experiencing instead.

3. *Quickly own and release your impulse to save the person, fix their problem, or share your own story that you think mirrors theirs*—If you feel badly for them (sympathy) or want to tell them they are right to feel the way they do (commiserate), stay silent. Breathe and return to feeling curious and believing in their ability to move forward with your coaching. Stay silent while they process their thoughts. When their emotions begins to subside, you can ask if they would share what is on their mind.
4. *If they have trouble articulating what they are experiencing, ask if there is a connection to the problem or desired outcome that they now better understand*—For example, you might offer, “It feels as if you are hurt or sad by what is going on at work. Do you think there something important you are not personally getting from your situation?” or “I hear you trying to explain what is going on but your pattern of saying "but" in every sentence has me wondering if your fear of other people’s judgments is holding you back. What do you think is really holding you back from taking the steps you named?” Be quiet until they respond, giving them time to think about your statement.
5. *If they seem confused by what you are offering as a reflection or question, offer your thoughts in another way*—rephrase your statements more concisely without explaining yourself, or accept they have a different meaning than you thought. Ask them what is important for them in this moment. Let them know you genuinely desire to understand what they are processing.

Remember, you are there to help them think through their situation, so they see what they want to do next. They will feel better if you let them move through their reactions at their own pace. It may take time for them to put the right words to what is emerging in their thoughts, but the new perceptions will take form in time