



Wendy Leebov's

HeartBeat



On The Quality Patient Experience

www.quality-patient-experience.com

Wendy's Soapbox

Can Empathy Be Learned?

Of course. That's how people BECOME empathetic in the first place. Children are not naturally empathetic. They are initially self-centered beings intent on getting their own needs met at all costs. Much of "growing up" has to do with moving from a role of taking to one of also giving, of learning to set our own thoughts, feelings, and needs aside sometimes, so we can make space for other people's. This ability, of course, is key to feeling and expressing empathy.



But what if a person does not learn these skills as they grew up? What if expressing empathy doesn't come naturally to them? Are they then hopeless? Of course not. If they *want* to learn to be empathetic, more often than not, they can.

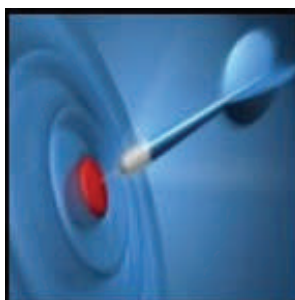
Reasons People Don't Show Empathy That Have Nothing to Do with Lacking Caring

Many people feel empathy and really care, but don't show it. Here are five reasons that I can think of, and no doubt there are more:

- John's personal stress, anxieties and preoccupations are all-consuming. At this moment, his racing mind prevents him from tuning in to the other person's feelings, despite the fact that he is capable of it.
- Susan is afraid she might be wrong about the feeling she thinks the other person is having, and that if she guesses wrong, this will make the person angry. So, she doesn't acknowledge their feeling.
- Ralph learned at an early age that big boys don't cry and that it's touchy-feeling and not macho to talk about feelings. He has feelings and he recognizes others' feelings, but you would never know it.
- Helene is afraid she will intrude into the person's space and violate their privacy. So, she feels for them but says nothing.

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Can Empathy Be Learned? (continued)

- Edith is afraid she won't know how to respond if the other person proceeds to talk about their feelings even more. So, she doesn't acknowledge their feelings in the first place.
- Manny feels he's way too busy to listen to people.
- Deep down, Jane feels that if she gives, she'll have nothing left for herself.

These people can learn to feel and express empathy if they address their personal barriers and decide that they want to be more effective by tuning in to their caring and communicating with empathy.

SO, how can you help people capable of empathy to EXPRESS it?

Label it. Distinguish between empathy and sympathy. Empathy takes effort. You read verbal and nonverbal cues and identify the feeling you think the other person is having. Sympathy involves feelings you have in response to the feelings the other person is having.

	Empathy	Sympathy
 <p>Focus of Attention</p>	The focus of attention is completely on the other person.	The focus of attention is on your experience in response to the other person's experience.

A Few Tips

- Don't rush to judgment. Don't assume people who don't express empathy lack caring. Operate on the assumption that they care and now need help *expressing* empathy so people feel it on the receiving end.
- Communicate a value on expressing empathy. Discuss the benefits for patients and families. Encourage empathy, not sympathy. [Click here](#) to take a look at a short, well-researched survey on patient perceptions of physician empathy. Show people patients' criteria for judging their doctors as empathetic.
- Engage people in discussing what holds them back from expressing their empathy. Help them come to terms with that, so that they open their minds to experimenting with more direct expression.
- Build the skill "Acknowledging feelings". Help people practice identifying feelings from nonverbal and verbal cues. [See video: Acknowledging Feelings for concrete examples and tips.](#) (After you click, scroll down to the jukebox video player and choose the "Acknowledging Feelings" video.)
- Before interactions, remind yourself and others to be present and tune in so well to the other person that you will notice signs of their feelings.
- Expand your feeling vocabulary. Most people use primarily four feeling words - sad, mad, glad and happy. This isn't enough. The more accurate and descriptive you can be when acknowledging a person's feelings, the more powerful for them. Relieved, worried, scared, disgusted, impatient, anxious, delighted, skeptical...these words go way beyond sad, mad, glad and happy.
- Remind people that, although expressing empathy might be hard for them for whatever their reason, it is healing for patients and families. And the truth is, expressing empathy aligns us with our caring nature and is healing for us too.



Click here for concrete approaches to developing
["Empathy Fitness for Leaders"](#).

2 Tool-Packed Best-Sellers

By Wendy Leebov

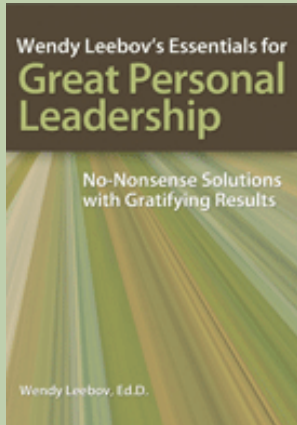
Easy, quick reads, designed to accommodate just-in-time management schedules.

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— Keith L. Gee, Senior Vice President, Organization Development, WellSpan Health; York, PA

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News from Wendy

- The Fall 2009 Newsletter from The Society for Healthcare Consumer Advocacy (SHCA) featured an article by Wendy entitled *Turn Up the Warmth to Turn Down the Heat: Heart-Head-Heart Communication*. [Click here to read the article.](#)
- SHCA also published a review of Wendy's video-based training system— *The Language of Caring* . Here is a quote from the review by past president of SHCA Carol Santalucia:

"As I experienced Wendy's engaging videos and materials, I was once again amazed by her work. Wendy is innovative and creative, and truly understands how to achieve an exceptional patient experience. Her videos are rich with great everyday examples. Her materials are easy to follow and make the process easy. The Heart-Head-Heart model is very effective and an easy way to teach healthcare providers the importance of first connecting with people emotionally before responding to their issues. What a great program for going deeper and moving our service excellence strategies forward!"

[Click here to learn about the Language of Caring System.](#)

- On October 5-7, 2009, Wendy is hosting an exhibit featuring her video-based training system at the annual Planetree Conference at the Marriott on the Waterfront in Baltimore, MD.
- October is Patient-Centered Care Awareness Month. [Click here](#) to learn more and to download a great toolkit to help you celebrate Patient-Centered Care Awareness Month in your organization.



Quoteworthy

"Yet, taught by time, my heart has learned to glow for other's good, and melt at other's woe."

—Homer

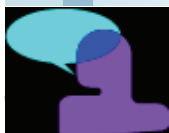


I Love This Book

Losing Face: A Memoir of Lost Identity and Self Discovery

By Kathy Torpie; Harper Collins, 2005.

In 1994, Kathy Torpie, a psychologist and journalist, suffered horrific facial injuries when a drunk driver crashed head-on into her car on a country road in New Zealand. After two 12-hour surgeries on her broken bones and shattered face, her body and face were pieced together with metal rods, plates and screws. When she awoke and looked in the mirror, she saw a stranger. **Losing Face** is a personal story and much more. Kathy Torpie has important insights for us as healthcare professionals who work with patients and families undergoing life-changing injury or illness. Visit Kathy's website: <http://www.kathytorpie.110mb.com>



Patients Speak

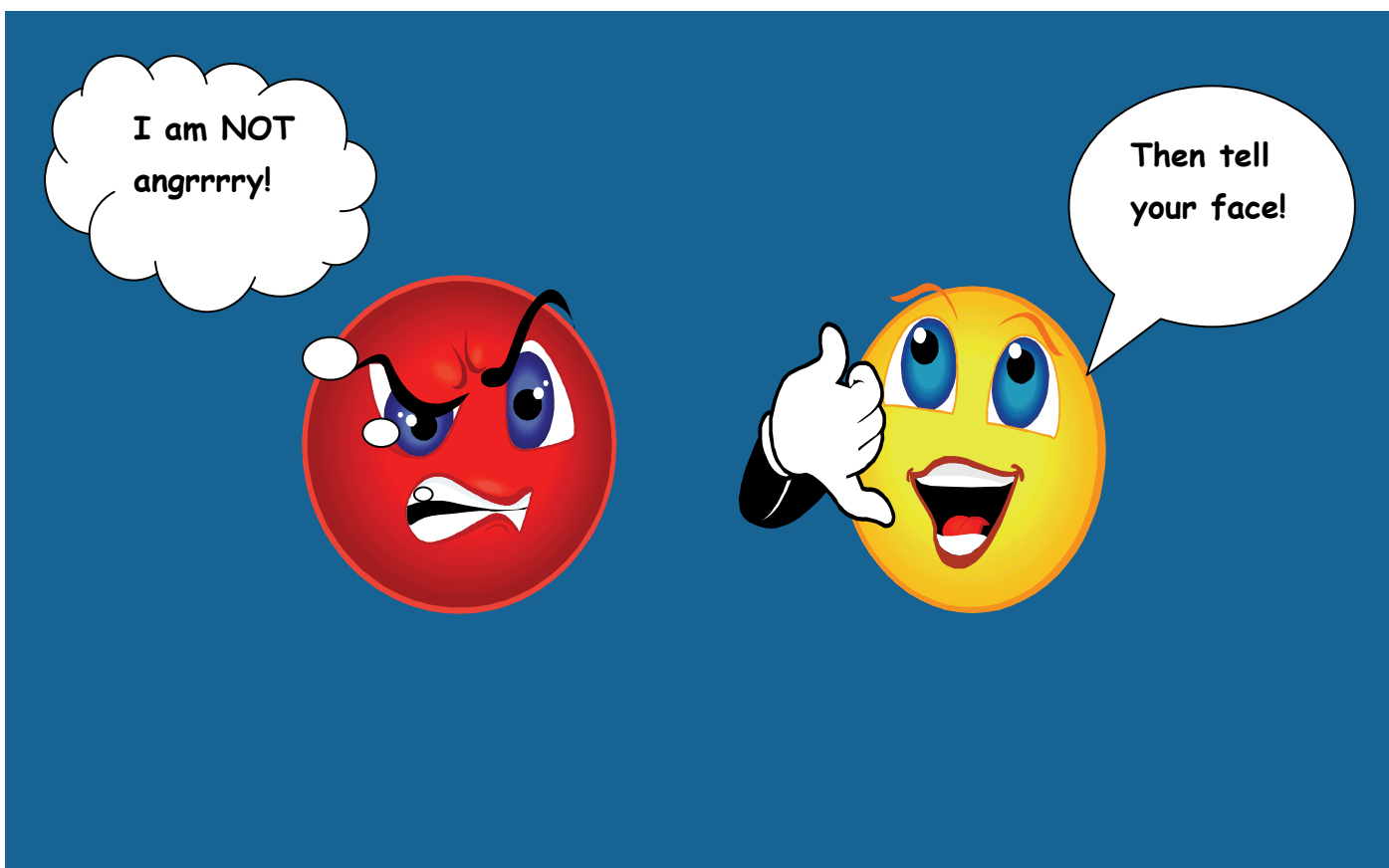
About WHAT PERSONAL CARE AND SERVICE MEAN TO ME

- "I want people to remember me if they've met me before."
- "When I hear 'that's against our policy,' it feels very impersonal."
- "It's offensive when medical people examine me as if I'm a bunch of bones and organs."
- "Whatever you can do to make me feel like a friend, not a stranger, I appreciate."
- "Hospitals are impersonal institutions until the staff people show their kindness."

[Click for Tool: "Respectful Use of Customer's Name"](#)

Graphic With A Message

Enjoy and share to make an important point.





Ask Your Team This Cage-Rattling Question: A Trigger For Crucial Conversations

- What does empathy mean to you?
- How do you rate yourself on empathy? Why?

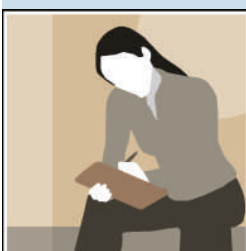
Ask these questions in a staff meeting. By calling attention to empathy and having people self-reflect, they will be more likely to *express* empathy.



Stress-Buster Spill It by Writing

Is an upcoming decision, frustration or concern preoccupying your mind? If so, it's very hard to stay present to the people you serve and with your friends, coworkers and family too.

To vent about something that plagues you and release some of the energy you're expending on it, grab a sheet of paper and WRITE. Spill it. Write AS MUCH AS YOU CAN AS FAST AS YOU CAN and don't worry about spelling or form or anything. Just SPILL IT. Let your thoughts and feelings flow from your heart and head out through your arm onto the page.



It's quite amazing how relieving and clarifying this can be.

Coming Up

- The Maddeningly Difficult Patient
- Patients Speak... About Their Biggest Pet Peeves



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Thank you!

Wendy Leebov

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