

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and *We Build Better Contractors*. First, some news about Boot Camp. Our Dallas Boot Camp scheduled for early November is full, but we are taking wait-list applications. So, if Dallas is your goal, your dream, you want to get there, let Charlotte know, and she'll put you on the waitlist. And if we can't get you in this go round, we'll catch you next time.

This week I want to talk about how to be empathetic when you're not empathetic. If you read the business press today, it's all about emotional intelligence and showing empathy and relating to your employees and all that stuff, but some of us aren't naturally empathetic. In fact, we recently, here at FBI, we took the EQI instrument, which measures your emotional intelligence in several different areas, and those of you that know me probably suspect that I didn't score all that well on empathy. I'll tell you where I did score well at the end of the blog, and those of you that know me won't be surprised at that either.

But emotional intelligence is strongly associated with success as a leader, and it just improves your engagement with your teams. So, what about this is important to you? Well, if you think about today, the CEO job is the hardest it's ever been. You've still got the huge responsibility of steering your corporate ship. You've got to drive revenue. You've got to drive margins. You've got to engage in business development. You've got to acquire talent. You've got to retain talent. You've got to have customer satisfaction. I mean, all those things that you've always done you've got to still do, but now you're supposed to be an empathetic leader, which maybe you haven't had to be in the past.

So maybe a quick definition of empathy, and that is simply connecting with your people in a meaningful way, okay? So, if you're not empathetic and it doesn't come naturally to you, what do you do? Well, I've got a simple answer, I think, and that is you need a playbook. If something doesn't come naturally to you, you've got to be prompted. You've got to be reminded. So, you need a bit of a playbook, and the playbook consists of two things, one, questions, and two, listening. All right, so just a few quick questions that anybody can use, you can pull them right out of your pocket. You can be trained to be empathetic. That's one of the great things, if you ask questions and you listen actively, then you will become more empathetic over time.

The first one is, "How is work for you these days?" You're in a field, you're at a job site, and you're interviewing some people, visiting with some people that maybe you wouldn't see in the course of your normal day, "How is work for you these days?" And just shut up and listen. Listen to what they have to say about their life and their experiences on your job.

The second thing is, "What's most challenging for you these days? What's going on? Tell me about it, et cetera, et cetera." And there again, be a good listener. The third thing, especially for your younger folks, "How would you like to see your career develop?" Some people may not have spent 10 seconds thinking about their career, they need a paycheck, and they need to feed their families. But some people might give you something really valuable there that you can build on.

The fourth one, "How can we make things easier for you?" That's a good one, right, because one of the great things that I read recently is we need to remove all the friction from our processes. This applies to the Experience Economy book that Dennis and I have talked about in the past. Remove friction for your customers, of course, but also remove friction for your employees. How can you find ways to make their jobs more doable, less arduous, easier for them?

The final thing is simply a personal interest question, "What do you do when you're not working? What are your hobbies? What are your passions? Tell me about your family," those kinds of things. What do you do when you're not working? Man, that's an easy one to pull out of your pocket. You'll get some enthusiastic feedback on that one, I would think. Ask follow-up questions when you get a chance. When somebody says, "Oh boy, I really like photography." "How'd you get into photography?" So simple follow-up questions so you just learn more about your people, for God's sakes, and be sure to listen.

Most of us that are leaders came up in an era when we weren't... You didn't have to be a great listener back then. Empathy wasn't on anybody's radar screen. It wasn't even a dictionary term that we learned about, but now that's just not the case. So, listen to your folks, okay? One of our members does a great thing, and they schedule lunches with the people, so maybe five to 10 employees at a time. Go out to the job site, order pizza, whatever it is, but get out there and be with your folks. Get them into a semi-informal setting and just ask the questions and listen to them. Empathy doesn't come naturally to most of us. We have to work on ourselves. It's just like your golf swing; think about how many hours you've spent tuning your golf swing or your tennis swing or whatever. If we spent that many hours working on ourselves and our ability to ask questions and engage with our people, how much better off would our companies be, for God's sake?

So let us know in the comment section what works for you. And let me circle back to one thing. I scored pretty low on empathy. Where were my highest scores? Again, this won't surprise anyone, self-regard. I was really high on self-regard. So, there it is, I've been vulnerable with the audience. I'd like to hear from you in the comments, what works for you in terms of engaging with your employees? What secrets or tips do you have for the rest of our audience? This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and *We Build Better Contractors*.