



Exercise: Building Empathy through Mirroring

Managers can better deal with negative emotions in the workplace when they make efforts to truly understand what leads to individual workers' emotional reactions. Empathizing with workers – being able to put yourself in their emotional 'shoes' – can be an important step toward understanding.

A primary component of empathy is the ability to mirror others nonverbally. We can teach ourselves to become more empathetic by **mirroring** the body positions, posture, tone, volume, gestures, and facial expressions of others. To understand how mirroring encourages empathy, imagine yourself in your most empathetic moments. Perhaps someone has suffered a loss in the family or some other trauma. It feels natural to stoop a little and use softer gestures and facial expressions when discussing the matter with them. Their demeanor prompts us to mirror them, and as we do, we learn more about how they feel. Forcing yourself to mirror another individual has largely the same effect.

Next time you encounter a worker who seems distressed, find a private spot immediately afterward and mirror them as accurately as you can from memory. How do you feel? How do you think they were feeling? Are your judgments confirmed at some later point?