

## FACILITATION TIP

# Harnessing Empathy

By seeking to understand the current emotional drivers and needs of your teammates – and how you are affected by those factors – you can maximize your opportunity and success as a facilitator.

### EMPATHY IN FACILITATION

Empathy can be divided into two sub categories: *cognitive empathy* and *affective empathy*.

Cognitive empathy is what we might first think of – the capacity to truly understand how another person is feeling without judging them or allowing their feelings to influence our own emotions.

Affective empathy can be described as the feelings and reactions we have to other people's emotions.

For example, in a facilitation session, you find yourself getting uncomfortable when you've asked a participant a question and they're having a hard time answering. Why? Is it because they are nervous or shy about speaking? You may be mirroring their stress. That's affective empathy.

When this happens, try to apply your cognitive empathy. If this person is feeling nervous or shy, what do they need to feel comfortable? Do they need time to think or words of encouragement? You may not be able to offer them a turtle shirt, but you can provide a safe and supportive environment by staying calm and focused while they talk.

### TAKEAWAYS

Adding empathy to your facilitation suitcase can help you:

- better understand your audience's needs and develop more effective ways to communicate with them individually
- recognize how other's emotions can impact you in a facilitation setting
- build confidence as a facilitator

In addition, empathy is a component of emotional intelligence critical to becoming an effective leader.

## 10 ways to help harness empathy in facilitation settings



### DO

Listen

Check your own emotions  
(are you mirroring?)

Observe

Pause

Wonder

### DON'T

Judge

Offer solutions

Label others' feelings

Fill the space

Make any assumptions