

Empathy increasingly recognised as critical for businesses

Increasingly recognised as a crucial leadership quality, empathy has been shown to have far-reaching effects in the workplace, including building a community of trust and contributing to the longevity and sustainability of a business, according to Greg Chen, CEO at Mobiz.



Source: www.pexels.com

This positive leadership trend is being implemented by local businesses, with two in five companies indicating that leading with empathy has become more critical for future resilience, according to the *Mercer Global Talent Trends 2020 – 2021 South African Report*.

Chen says that overall, seismic shifts have occurred in the workplace as a result of the pandemic. “It is now more important than ever for businesses to place a focus on strong leadership to encourage engagement and loyalty from employees. This is to promote a positive work environment and unleash productivity and business growth.”

Blurry work-home lines

“Working throughout the pandemic has resulted in a great deal of stress for many,” says Chen. “For example, with the work-home lines being blurred, many employees have juggled a disruptive home environment, and have had to work while looking after their children. It is for reasons such as these that the pandemic has shone a spotlight on empathy as we come to understand the different circumstances in which an employee finds themselves.”

Echoing Chen's sentiment is Rochelle Knock, head of customer value management at Multichoice, who says that leadership is inherently about getting the most and best out of others. "This can be hard to do if you are not empathetic towards others."

Along with empathy, Knock believes that accountability is key when it comes to good leadership. "Both are important skills to master, as effectively it just becomes more of that as you move higher and higher from a leadership perspective."

When it comes to key characteristics of a leader, Chelsea Fredericks, digital mobile specialist at Lewis Group, says that being a good leader means being open to different perspectives and views. She also believes one of the most essential things a leader can do is treat their employees with respect and empathy: "It allows leaders to build and develop relationships with those they lead."



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Julia Kerr Henkel 22 Sep 2021



Creating learning opportunities

"It is also important for leaders to give their employees permission to make mistakes, and thus, to grow," adds Jessica Hampton, marketing coordinator at JD group. For Hampton, being a good leader is about offering support and creating learning opportunities when team members make mistakes. "A good leader should also be passionate, determined, honest, a team player and build others up," she asserts.

In closing, Chen says that when a leader shows empathy towards others, it can have a ripple effect. Employees feel comfortable to share ideas unlocking innovation, they feel valued, which inspires them to produce great work and they become more understanding towards their fellow colleagues and clients.

Although the pandemic has brought on a slew of hardship for many, it has also brought on great learning opportunities which will have a positive impact now and well into the future – one being the importance of empathy. As such, for businesses to remain relevant and sustainable, it is vital to ensure they run on the foundation of empathy to retain top talent in a post-pandemic world.

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