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By Rick Boxx

THE BENEVOLENCE OF BURDEN-BEARING

One day during a period of some difficult changes at work, I asked an employee how she was doing. She responded that she was fine. I looked her in the eyes and said, "No. How are you really doing?" I could see from her demeanor that the upheaval at our business was taking a negative toll on her.

The next morning, with tears in her eyes, this employee approached me to say my heartfelt question the previous day had touched her. It made her understand that I really cared. She then expressed important thoughts about how she perceived the changes and what was troubling her the most.

A study by an employee benefits administration company discovered 33 percent of people would be willing to switch companies if they knew they would receive more empathy, and 40 percent said they would work longer hours as long as they felt assured that those they were working for genuinely cared about them and their well-being.

This is interesting, since empathy is not a topic given much attention in business schools, if at all. Even in management training, the focus is typically on how to get things done most productively and efficiently, not on how to address the heartfelt needs of the people doing the work.

Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. In the business and professional world, we can easily ignore the feelings of others. Maximizing profits and satisfying stakeholders tend to take priority. But genuinely

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caring for others can make a tremendous difference in developing loyal employees that are more content and productive because they feel valued.

In the Bible's New Testament, *Galatians 6:2 teaches, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."* Another way to express this is "sharing the load." The weight of emotions, or the strain of dealing with problems that cannot be quickly resolved, can overwhelm. Sometimes we can help in specific, tangible ways. Other times all we can do is communicate to the other person that we care – and sometimes, that is enough. We might assure them we are praying for them. Helping to bear someone else's burdens might be an act of benevolence they will never forget.

The Scriptures affirm this principle in other ways:

Willingness to put others first. Whether our role is that of executive, supervisor or coworker, showing empathy to others communicates we are concerned for their best interests. *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." (Romans 15:1).*

Doing as we would want others to do for us. If you were in the middle of circumstances that seemed overwhelming, would you want to experience the concern and care of others to help you through the difficult time? *"...serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:13-14).*

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. In general, how often do you see empathy expressed and demonstrated in the workplace? In what ways have you seen this done?
2. Can you think of a time when you became the beneficiary of someone else's sincere concern and caring? How did that make you feel?
3. Some people are more naturally empathetic than others. How would you rate yourself on an "empathy scale" – very empathetic, somewhat empathetic, not very empathetic? Explain your answer.
4. Even if empathy is not one of our natural assets, how can we strive to be more empathetic, more considerate of the concerns and needs of others going through difficult times?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 12:14,18, 15:4, 16:24, 20:5,12; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20,26

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