



## 5 Ways to Practice Distanced Empathy--a Cornerstone of Effective Leadership

Leading effectively with both heart and mind.

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In an era where servant leadership has become the gold standard, balancing deep connection with the right measure of detachment--distanced empathy--has emerged as a subtle yet powerful skill for effective leaders.

Leadership, in its most transformative form, is about serving, guiding, and influencing. It is about creating and effectively communicating a compelling vision, building strong teams, empowering them, and ensuring these teams turn vision into more tangible shared goals and ultimately reality. This process of guiding and serving followers and peers demands not only business acumen but strong leadership skills, especially a deep understanding of the human element--what motivates and drives team members, their strengths, and their vulnerabilities.

To build such an understanding, leaders must cultivate genuine relationships with their team members and turn those relationships into trusting relationships, the cornerstone of strong teams and effective leadership. This is where emotional intelligence, particularly empathy, comes into play. Empathy allows leaders to step into their team members' shoes, seeing the world through their lens and understanding their unique challenges and aspirations.

However, empathy in leadership is not without its complexities. The leaders I work with often encounter team members dealing with a range of issues--be it consequences of illness, burnout, interpersonal conflicts, or serious personal and family matters. Here, the concept of distanced empathy becomes vital. While empathy is a prerequisite for leading people effectively, maintaining a certain emotional distance is equally important. This "distanced

empathy" enables leaders to remain objective and make sound decisions without being overwhelmed by the emotional weight of their team members' issues.

To help leaders apply distanced empathy, I usually ask them to try the following:

1. Foster a culture of open communication: Creating an environment where team members feel comfortable sharing their concerns while knowing that their leader will maintain a professional perspective.
2. Actively listen and observe: Leaders must engage in active listening and observation, understanding the nuances of team members' communications, both verbal and non verbal.
3. Recognize and respect boundaries: Leaders need to recognize personal and professional boundaries, both in themselves and their team members.
4. Provide support without over-identification: Leaders should offer support and resources, but avoid becoming so emotionally entangled that it hinders their ability to lead effectively.
5. Make decisions with compassionate detachment: Balancing compassion with a level of detachment is key in making decisions that are fair and beneficial for both the individual and the team.

Distanced empathy is a cornerstone of effective leadership. It's about leading with both heart and mind, ensuring deep empathy for team members while maintaining the clarity and objectivity needed for effective decision-making. Leaders who practice distanced empathy lead professionally and more effectively, as they ensure that personal connections coexist with professional excellence.

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