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Drive Results Through Collaboration



ANNIE MCKEE: EMPATHY IN THE WORKPLACE IS UP TO US

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Masters of Leadership with Erica Dhawan: Annie McKee. Empathy In The Workplace is Up To Us

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Empathy is something we all want but may not be so good at giving – and sadly, empathy in the workplace is often non-existent as a result. My guest today is Annie McKee, an amazing woman who has studied and written on the subject of empathy extensively. Her new book, “How To Be Happy At Work” is a wonderful contribution to the body of work on the subject because it points out the importance of healthy, happy relationships in the workplace, and gives practical advice about how to foster them.

I’m delighted to have Annie on the show as my first guest for the new season. She’s a true Master of Leadership, so I invite you to listen, learn, and apply what she shares.

A true #leader influences others in a positive direction that they want and that benefits others. Wisdom from @AnnieMckee shared on this episode of #MastersOfLeadership with @EDhawan. #GetBigThingsDone

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A true leader influences others in a positive direction that they want and that benefits others

Annie’s definition of leadership is one I resonate with. Her emphasis on leadership being “influence in a positive direction” ties directly to the issue of Emotional Intelligence. Leaders need to evaluate whether they are influencing those they lead with positive emotions (empathy) or negative emotions. That’s because in Annie’s words...

Emotional Intelligence (empathy) is the skill set necessary for organizational success.

Annie and I invite you to listen to our conversation, where she shares how empathy in the workplace can improve both the experience of the workers and the productivity of the organization. But she goes beyond theory and provides practical examples of how every person in an organization can contribute to the level of empathy the team expresses and experiences. It's a valuable interaction you'll find very helpful.

Leaders can set up structures that cultivate empathy within their teams

Annie believes that most people want to treat others with consideration and kindness and that one of the main reasons they don't is directly tied to the busyness of life in the modern world. When asked what can be done to increase empathy in the workplace, Annie had great advice to share.

She suggests that leaders should think through how to create structures that remind and enable their entire team to slow down. This simple action causes the hurry and pace of business take a backseat to the health of the relationships on the team.

One way this can be done is by structuring meetings with a short but specific time for simple connections. When people are able to interact with each other in a non-hurried, authentic way, it makes for a more enjoyable workplace and increases productivity and creativity dramatically. We all use that sort of boost in our organizations, couldn't we?

Learn how #leaders can set up structures that cultivate #empathy within their teams from @AnnieMckee shared on this episode of #MastersOfLeadership with @EDhawan. #GetBigThingsDone

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Simple ways to communicate with better “tone” using digital tools

We've all received that email or Slack message that comes across negatively – the person seems rude, angry, condescending, or patronizing. Because the communication in question is digital, it's easy to do because there's no body language or voice tone to complement the black and white text of the message. On the receiving end, it's both easy and natural to respond badly in response to that kind of communication. Annie describes a better way...

- Stay in the place of reason – don't get emotionally hijacked
- Think through a reasoned response – or don't answer until you can
- Give the person the benefit of the doubt – get into their shoes. Ask, “Why might they have made a mistake like this?”
- Think of ways you can create an environment that provides the opportunity for better connection and clarity. Maybe suggest a phone call or video chat to get to deal with the issues.

These simple examples demonstrate why Annie is the leader she is. She's able to cut through the noise and hurry and address issues on a human level. You'll enjoy hearing her insights on this episode.

You can encourage empathy in your organization without being the top leader

Most of the leaders out there who listen to this show are in middle management positions or below. They don't possess the needed leverage to make organization-wide changes to the culture of their workplace. But that doesn't mean there's nothing they can do to amplify empathy in the workplace. Annie provides these powerful suggestions regarding how you can increase the level of empathy in your workplace.

Becoming a change-agent starts by making yourself aware of your sphere of influence. Who are the people you interact with regularly, within your team and across departments? Once you see the broader group of people who are within your orbit, ask this vital question...

“What can I DO to create an environment around me where the values and norms that will help the entire team succeed can happen?”

Then take action. If you're a team leader or are responsible for the outcomes of a group, establish norms in your area of competence with the help of your team. You'll be surprised at how much buy-in you get.

If every single person in your workplace took these simple steps 10% more than they do now the entire organization would improve dramatically. I like to say, "Don't look up, look around."

You can encourage #empathy in your organization without being the top #leader. Learn how from @AnnieMckee shared on this episode of #MastersOfLeadership with @EDhawan. #GetBigThingsDone

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Outline of This Episode

- [0:49] Who is Annie McKee?
- [2:00] What leadership means to Annie
- [2:59] How are emotional intelligence and empathy different – and the same?
- [5:17] Ways we can build better structures to cultivate empathy on our teams
- [9:15] Making virtual work a place where empathy can be cultivated
- [18:27] When it comes to empathy, is there a difference between types of people?
- [23:00] The phenomenon of “covering” – in order to conform and fit in
- [26:12] How you can change your culture when you're not the top leader
- [29:33] What's the business impact of stronger emotional intelligence skills?
- [32:33] Annie's top 3 pieces of advice to become a Master of Leadership

Resources & People Mentioned

- [Annie McKee online](#)
- Annie [on Twitter](#)
- Annie [on Facebook](#)
- Annie [on LinkedIn](#)
- BOOK: [Primal Leadership](#)
- BOOK: [Resonant Leadership](#)
- BOOK: [Becoming a Resonant Leader](#)
- BOOK: [How To Be Happy At Work](#)
- [ZOOM](#)
- [BlueJeans](#)
- [Episode featuring Dr. Naomi Baron](#)
- [Kenji Yoshino](#)

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