

A black and white portrait of Jesús de la Garza, a man with glasses and a beard, looking thoughtfully at the camera. The background is dark and textured.

EMPATHY VS. SYMPATHY

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LET'S START WITH THE DEFINITION OF EACH

Empathy:* "The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner. Also: the capacity for this"

Sympathy:* "An affinity, association, or relationship between persons or things wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the other"

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY?

Empathy is the ability to connect with someone by putting ourselves in the other person's shoes.

One of the main differences between **Empathy and Sympathy** is the level of engagement. In other words, when I'm being empathetic with someone, I have the ability to connect and disengage from the person, story and decision making. I will accompany the individual on the path they decide to take trusting in their own capacity/ability in their decision making.

On the other hand, when sympathetic, the listener is engaged due to the affinity involved in the relationship. In this case, the level of trust in the individual on decision making is limited. There is not enough trust in their ability to make an "appropriate" decision, so there is a higher level of engagement and involvement in the story. Due to this, opinions are usually made to avoid the person making a "wrong" decision, not trusting their ability to take a "right path", or try to avoid pain or time in their learning process. Making assumptions about the other person's feelings, thoughts or assuming "what is best" play more of an active role in Sympathy than in Empathy. Also, time pressure is a factor to consider, especially when it prevents the leader to enable the team to have their own learning curve due to time constraints and pressure to perform among other factors.

This makes a difference when companies let their employees learn from their own mistakes and those who do not. When there is a direct impact on results, there is less room for making wrong decisions. Giving your team the room to fail and learn from their own mistakes is easier said than done, especially when the results impact the leader's perception of success.

“Empathy is the ability to connect with someone by putting ourselves in the other person’s shoes.” **jesús de la garza**



WHAT ROLE DOES EMPATHY AND SYMPATHY PLAY IN FAILURE?

Is a leader successful if his or her team fails? Is a father or mother successful if one of their family members fail? What is failure? In my experience dealing with issues in my professional and family life, the bottom line is my own validation of success rather than the family or the team. In other words, if one of my family members fails to decide what to study – I think it’s a failure due to the impact it will have on their professional career. The question is, do I have the ability to support their decision? Or do I intervene so they will not fail? The same applies to our teams at work. As a leader, how much are we willing to invest time and money on the empowerment of our teams?

In both cases, a connection exists but the main difference is the level of engagement. This is why empathy is a big challenge with people closer to us, where love, affection or some kind of interest are involved. Being objective and clear with our loved ones is challenging and very difficult to have clarity when we are heavily invested in a decision. The ability to disengage from the end result can also be applicable in our business and our teams. Sometimes, help from the outside is needed to enable us to see things more clearly.

Think about the people and situations you have not been able to disengage from. Knowing this, you may want to apply the technique reviewed in the last paper, [Empathy in Leadership](#), to help you make a shift from being sympathetic to being empathetic.

We will explain apathy and antipathy in the next publication.

**Merriam-Webster dictionary*

CHECKLIST

- Call: 956.530.0907
- Email: Jesus@MonarchLeaders.com
- Visit: MonarchLeaders.com
- Set up a Workshop



To learn more, visit MonarchLeaders.com or email Jesus@MonarchLeaders.com