

# Solving the World's Greatest Challenges With Empathy

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As the world becomes more decentralized the call for unselfish understanding has never been greater. It's often thought that to change the world those with the greatest intellect are needed, but what if another skill set is equally (if not more) important? **Empathy.**

[Dr. Noelle Nelson](#), author of "[Make More Money by Making Your Employees Happy](#)," defines empathy as, "The experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective; placing oneself in another person's shoes, so to speak, to feel/sense/better understand what they are going through."

**When talking about social entrepreneurship, this skill becomes vitally important as workers and volunteers from around the world gather and collaborate to solve problems.** Being able to lead a group and cultivate empathy from within the organization is of tremendous benefit.

[Ashoka](#), a network of social entrepreneurs worldwide, believes in empathy so much they have [launched an empathy initiative](#). Within this movement they have put together a curriculum to teach elementary-age children the skills of empathy. Ashoka has identified that to be a positive changemaker in the world, citizens need a skill set that will help them to resolve conflict, collaborate, listen effectively and make thoughtful decisions. Ashoka envisions that worldwide contributors of good in the future will have mastered empathy with the same vigor with which they are taught math and reading.

The good news is that already-established organizations can jump aboard the empathy movement too. "You can implant empathy at any stage of an organization's growth," says Dr. Nelson, who is also a clinical psychologist and business trial consultant. "What it takes is leadership from the top down by direct example: asking people the whys and wherefores, making it safe for people to describe their method, approach or process."

Dr. Nelson says this understanding of one another within an organization breeds cooperation. "If you sense I'm making an effort to see where you're coming from, you'll be more willing to work with me," says Dr. Nelson.

Psychologist Dr. Carey Cherniss has come to similar conclusions. Empathy is a cornerstone attribute to emotional intelligence (EQ) and Dr. Cherniss has long studied the field of EQ. In 1999 [Dr. Cherniss published a paper](#) citing a 19-point case for businesses to pay attention to EQ, citing research and data from others. In one case study on L'Oreal, the cosmetics and beauty company, high EQ employees who had been hired based on certain emotional competencies had 63 percent less turnover during their first year than those selected in the typical manner.

## Applying Empathy

To begin making changes within your organization Dr. Nelson offers a few pieces of advice. First, don't scream at an employee that they're doing something wrong. Instead, find out if they understood what the assignment was and whether or not they are qualified with the knowledge and skills to fulfill the task. Once you understand they have the relevant training, begin to examine their method or the process they applied in approaching the work.

An important note is to never make someone wrong for how they executed their approach—especially now that you understand their thought process. Rather, say something like, "Ok, I see why you did XYZ, but I'd like to suggest an alternative that I think will be more effective."

**For social entrepreneurs, approaching the world's greatest challenges with empathy might be most effective.**

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