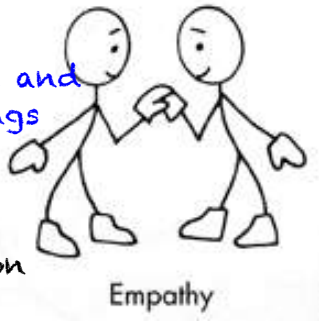
Empathy

Empathy – **Definition** – the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings



Activity One – Read the article paying attention to your pronunciation and intonation and answer the comprehension questions which follow.

What can call centre managers do to improve agent empathy skills? (from callcentrehelper.com)

"The capacity to know emotionally what another is experiencing from within the frame of reference of that other person, the capacity to sample the feelings of another or to put oneself in another's shoes."

In other words, an empathetic response meets four conditions:

1. An **awareness** of the state of being of another
2. An understanding of the condition
3. A personal identification with the situation
4. An appropriate, affective **response**.

Put simply, it is the ability of one individual to understand another by placing themselves hypothetically in their position. It has become commonplace to say that call centre agents don't exhibit empathy on a consistent basis with customers, and recent studies clearly support this.

Undoubtedly, demonstrating strong empathy skills, in addition to providing the customer with the information/service they require, plays a key role in ensuring customer satisfaction.

It is clear that agents must demonstrate empathy with customers to ensure customer satisfaction, but the reality is that agents often do not. Why is this? Several factors are involved, not least of which is the lack of effective training, monitoring and coaching.

Why aren't current processes working?

The primary culprit is the initial communication training that agents go through. Too often this training is an information download, or, especially in the case of a soft skill such as empathy, an oversimplified e.Learning module which provides no opportunity for:

- Analysis of successful and unsuccessful calls and the role of empathy in them.
- Practice of key skills in context

Agents are given a set of standard phrases to use with customers, but more often than not, these are statements of sympathy, not empathy,

and come across to customers as condescending and insincere. Coaches and team leaders are not recognising the role and importance of empathy in the success of a call.

What can call centre managers do to help improve agents' empathy skills?

Empathy is an important skill in order to communicate effectively, build relationships and build trust with your customers. The ability to empathise and win the trust of your customer is essential to winning new customers, retaining your customers and handling complaints.

Implementing the following training techniques will help to develop an agent's empathy skills:

1. Role plays

Role-playing games in a learning environment can be a very flexible and effective tool, helping to build teams, develop employee motivation and improve communication skills.

2. Training exercises

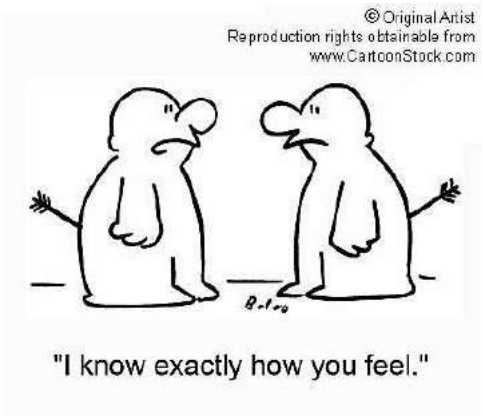
Ensure that specific training exercises are available for agents and focus on the following areas:

- Helping to build rapport – Identify rapport-establishing phrases, questions, and then role-play to demonstrate. Role players must be aware of their tone and whether it is suitable.
- Introduce specific empathetic questions – Identify suitable empathic questions in order to gather the information required – what questions need to be answered in order to help, how to ask for this information and in what tone.

3. Introduce an empathic buddy system

The main benefit of implementing a buddy system, whereby an agent pairs up with another agent, is that they are given the opportunity to receive honest feedback from one another. Agents can not only praise one another when a call has gone well but they can also learn from each other by working together as a team to identify areas of improvement.

Put simply	Basically
Undoubtedly	The fact is
It is clear that	In fact
the reality is	It seems that
In reality	It's clear that
Obviously	Several factors
Clearly	are involved
Essentially	

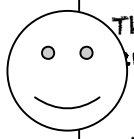


Questions - Using the following words and expressions to introduce EACH of your answers, answer the questions:

1. What is the subject of the article?
2. Did you find the article interesting?
3. What conditions do an empathetic response need?
4. Do call centre agents generally show enough empathy?
5. Which factors contribute to the lack of empathy in calls?
6. Which solutions are offered in the article?
7. Do you agree that lack of empathy is a problem in your unit?
8. How are you trained to use empathy?
9. Do you agree that empathy increases customer satisfaction?
10. How do you use empathy in calls?
11. Do you find it easy to have empathy?
12. In which cases do you find it hard to show empathy?

Activity Two - Empathetic Expressions in English

'I understand what you mean'.
'I can see where you are coming from'.
'That must have made you feel ....'
'I understand why you would think that way'.
'That must have been difficult for you'
'I see what you mean.'
'I totally understand how you feel.'
'Yes, indeed I can see why that must have been a problem for you.'
'I do understand how you feel but...'
'Although I understand how you feel...'



Empathic or Empathetic ? BOTH !
The older form is **mpathic** (1909). The form **empathetic** derives from the more familiar pairing of **sympathy** and **sympathetic.**

Activity Three - Using the tone of your voice and empathetic expressions, show empathy in the following role-plays:

1. A client calls to complain that he has still not received the mattress he ordered to go with the bed frame he collected from the store three weeks ago, he has returned from his honeymoon and has no bed!

2. A client calls to explain that he has been sent the wrong screws after waiting ten days for them to arrive in the post! He has no cupboard doors in his new kitchen!

3. An old lady calls, she is very upset about the time she had to wait in the store cash-line.

4. A lady calls to complain that there was no room for her child in the Smalland in the store she visited, and as she is eight months pregnant it was very hard for her to go around the store with a four year old! She is very angry because she chose IKEA because of the child-care facilities.

5. A young man calls to complain that the sofa he bought has broken after only six months of use in his student flat. He is disappointed because he has no income and it was expensive for him!