

Quadrant II Newsletter

Research shows that the difference between leaders who derail in their career and those that soar to great heights is social skills. Social skills appear in the second quadrant of Stephen R. Covey's Importance-Urgency matrix: social skills are important to a career but not urgent (Covey is author of the top-selling business book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*). Quadrant II provides an opportunity for business and technical professionals to learn and try out new social skills based in science.

13Jan2016, author: Valerie Patrick, PhD, *The Key Way to Improve Business Relationships*

Quotable (*Key Message*)

At the heart of productive business relationships is empathy; and, neuroscience is uncovering the brain processes associated with empathy.

Quantify (*The Science*)

Neuroscience is uncovering the “hardness” of soft skills like empathy. The hardness of soft skills refers to the involvement of conscious cognitive brain processes.

In his book *Social Intelligence*, psychologist Dr. Daniel Goleman speaks to the importance of empathy as follows: “One indicator of rapport is mutual empathy: both partners experience being experienced...When people are in rapport, they can be more creative together and more efficient in making decisions.....”

Empathy has been described by some to be solely the domain of the amygdala which triggers emotions without our conscious awareness. However, recent advances in the science of empathy reveal the involvement of the Anterior

Cingulate Cortex (ACC) or conscious thought. In fact, the Orbitofrontal Cortex (OFC) where the amygdala, ACC, and brain stem come together, and spindle cells which form particularly thick connections between the OFC and ACC have been tied to self-regulation of emotional responses and forming lasting first impressions when we meet others (see Dr. Daniel Goleman in *Social Intelligence*, pages 63-81). First impressions and self-regulation of emotional response both factor in to our ability to be empathic and establish rapport.

In their review paper, Dr. Stephanie Preston, Behavioral Neuroscientist at University of Michigan, and Alicia J. Hofelich (see http://www-personal.umich.edu/~presto/Downloads/PrestonHofelich_ERinpress.pdf) summarize the science of empathy as a collection of different but related concepts. Specifically, they define empathy as “the processes by which observers come to understand and/or feel the state of another through direct perception or imagination of their state. Doing this includes emotion contagion, “true empathy,” and cognitive empathy under a larger umbrella of empathic phenomenon, linked by their common reliance on perception-action processes.” In other words, because the mechanism of “perception-action process” has been identified as the basis for both emotional and cognitive aspects of empathy, then empathy is a more complex phenomenon that needs to be viewed as a system involving both emotional and cognitive processes. The mechanism of “perception-action process” involves “neural self-other overlap” which Dr. Goleman describes as follows: “to understand what someone else experiences – to empathize – we utilize the same brain wiring that is active during our own experience” (see *Social Intelligence* page 59).

Qualify (*Put into Practice*)

One way to improve empathy is by listening to understand another. In his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey contrasts the skill of

listening to understand with the more common skill of listening to be understood. In listening to be understood, a person is listening to determine what their response is going to be. In listening to understand, the listener rephrases in their own words what the speaker is saying with the following statement: “what I hear you saying is...” This rephrasing process is repeated until the listener has captured what the speaker is saying to their satisfaction.

A second way to improve empathy is through a process called reappraisal. Sometimes we don’t empathize with a person because we feel that they don’t deserve out empathy for some reason. In reappraisal, your perception of another is altered for the better by changing the context. The change of context can be self-inflicted or facilitated by a third party. Dr. Daniel Goleman provides the following example of reappraisal in his book *Social Intelligence*:

“How sad. That poor woman standing there all alone, in front of that church sobbing. The funeral must be going on inside. She must miss horribly whomever she’s lost...On second thought, that’s not a funeral. There’s a white limo decorated with pretty flowers in front of the church – it’s a wedding! How sweet...”

Quip (*Fun*)



The skill of listening to understand means being fully engaged when someone is speaking to you. In this picture, Bradley Fine, played by Jude Law, is clearly distracted and closed to listening with understanding to CIA Boss Elaine Crocker, played by Allison Janney,

from the movie “Spy.” Sadly, the disconnection from others that results from pre-occupation with electronic devices is all too common these days.

Quest (*Resources*)

Dr. Valerie Patrick, Founder and President of Fulcrum Connection LLC, provides training, consulting, and keynotes on facilitation, teamwork, collaboration, creativity, innovation, social intelligence, change management, and thriving on a steep learning curve. Contact Dr. Patrick (valerie.patrick@fulcrumconnection.com or text 412-742-9675) to set up an exploratory call.

Check out the new “Science of Success: Social Secrets” podcast on iTunes here: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/science-of-success-podcast/id1063826280>. Please click on “ratings” in iTunes to provide your input. All comments are welcome and encouraged!

See Episode 6 of the Science of Success: Social Secrets” podcast called “How the Most Successful Knowledge Workers Work” and read about the surprising secret to increasing your value in the workplace on the Competent Collaborator Blog here: <http://fulcrumconnection.com/blog/surprising-secret-to-increasing-your-value-in-the-workplace/>.

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Fulcrum Connection specializes in instructional design, training, speaking, facilitation and consulting to develop skills in leadership, innovation, sustainability, troubleshooting teamwork, and managing technical professionals.