Empathy is Back on the Agenda as Offices Resume

Tuesday 28 July, 2020

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Employers should not leave individuals to handle the return on their own

These months have been tumultuous. Our lives have been changed immeasurably in almost every area. Underlying our new day-to-day reality is a far deeper sense of shift and discomfort, and flailing confidence.

We have lost our sense of perceived control and it has left us reeling and at an emotional crossroads. We have been simultaneously under the instructions of multiple government and health organisations, not to mention corporates, and far removed from an ability to implement any of our own. Suddenly the ability to plan, to predict next quarter's revenues, or to move with purpose has been cut off.

The impact of this is far reaching, and whilst we were experiencing increasing rates of anxiety, depression and burnout before the crisis, the COVID-19 months indicate an ever-higher spike in such symptoms.

"*The impact of the pandemic on people's mental health is already extremely concerning*," said **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the **World Health Organization**. "*Social isolation, fear of contagion, and loss of family members is compounded by the distress caused by loss of income and often employment*."

Re-connecting with your networks

As our cities attempt to rebuild, and we slowly emerge from homes, it will be mutual connectivity and understanding that will allow us to prosper. Empathy is at the core of both of these. We can expect the need for emotional support in the workplace to have increased, and with staff having now been isolated for an extended period of time, business leaders will need to focus on individualising their shared sense of purpose.

Seeing people as unique has become necessary as we realise that we have all experienced the last 120 plus days from differing perspectives. It means empathising with the realities of each of our team members from a mental health view and ensuring potential anxieties around leaving the home are considered. For those who are vulnerable or who have vulnerable or shielding family members at home this is particularly important.

Regenerating trust and conversation via open and empathetic communication will be a key differentiator between those that thrive in the months immediately after a return to the office and those that do not.

Feeding the need

Research indicates that being able to use empathy is crucial for mental health and adds immeasurably to relationship success. This is due to our innate need to be connected to others. Consider the worst of the world's penalties for law breakers - solitary confinement. It is well documented that being alone, segregated and separated from others is quite literally the worst punishment we can be subject to.

Yet, so often we overlook this critical need for empathetic connection. As we come back, more than ever, a shared understanding that creates harmonious and effective relationships is as key to our businesses growth as it is to our emotional wellbeing.

On a micro level, empathy will allow us to better co-exist with colleagues and teams, providing a more collaborative environment. On a macro-social level, where we increasingly see a disregard toward truly connecting as people, first and foremost, the strengthening of our shared empathy is critical.

Our ability to thrive, both as individuals and as organisations, in the months ahead will depend on it.

*- **Mimi Nicklin***
*is author of **'Softening The Edge'** and presenter of **Empathy for Breakfast** with over 70,000 views of the show so far.*

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For more information, and regular updates, go to www.miminicklin.com or follow Mimi on social media: @MimiNicklin.

To tune into Empathy for Breakfast, click here.

Softening The Edge available for pre-order now and due for release in September. Get in touch for a copy.

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About Mimi Nicklin:

Mimi Nicklin is an experienced marketer and communications specialist, and a well-known empathetic leader. For over fourteen years she has been working across the globe with her clients to drive stand-out creative interventions that lead to business and culture change. Driven by the pursuit of bringing conscientiousness to the role and with a desire to make the world of work a more empathetic, valuable and sustainably healthy place to be, Mimi is currently working on her first book to be published later this year – Softening The Edge. Having lived and worked in London, Hong Kong, Singapore, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Dubai, Mimi's uniquely global perspective impacts organisations from the inside out, focusing on cultural, behavioural and mindset change. Currently based in Dubai, she is a natural coach, writer and creative mind, and has held roles as diverse as Strategic Director, Vice President and Creative Officer in some of the world's leading advertising agencies. Mimi's passion for balancing humanism with capitalism, drives her commitment to leading the practice of conscientious and empathetic leadership, and her 'principles of people', into organisations worldwide.

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