Habit 1: Cultivate Curiosity About Strangers

Highly empathic people (HEPs) have an insatiable curiosity about strangers. They will talk to the person sitting next to them on the bus, having retained that natural inquisitiveness we all had as children. Curiosity expands our empathy when we talk to people outside our usual social circle, encountering lives and worldviews very different from our own. Cultivating curiosity requires more than having a brief chat about the weather. Crucially, it tries to understand the world inside the head of the other person. We are confronted by strangers every day, like the heavily tattooed woman who delivers your mail or the new employee who always eats his lunch alone.

Set yourself the challenge of having a conversation with one stranger every week.

All it requires is courage.

Habit 2: Challenge Prejudices/Discover Commonalities

We all have assumptions about others and use collective labels—e.g., “Muslim fundamentalist,” “welfare mom”—that prevent us from appreciating their individuality. HEPs challenge their own preconceptions and prejudices by searching for what is the same rather than different. For example:

Claiborne Paul Ellis was born into a poor white family in Durham, N.C. in 1927. Finding it hard to make ends meet working in a garage and believing African Americans were the cause of all his troubles, he followed his father’s footsteps and joined the Ku Klux Klan, eventually rising to the top position of Exalted Cyclops of his local KKK branch. As a prominent local citizen—to In 1971 he was invited—a 10-day community meeting to tackle racial tensions in schools., He was chosen to head a steering committee with Ann Atwater, a black activist he despised. But working with Ann exploded his prejudices about African Americans. He saw that she shared the same issues with poverty. “I was beginning to look at a black person, shake hands with him, and see him as a human being.” “It was almost like bein’ born again.” On the final night of the meeting, he stood in front of 1,000 people and tore up his Klan membership card. Ellis later became a labor organizer for a union whose membership was 70 percent African American. He and Ann remained friends for the rest of their lives.
## Habit 1: Cultivate Curiosity About Strangers

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<th>What I already do well.</th>
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## Habit 2: Challenge Prejudices/Discover Commonalities

| What I already do well. | How I could be better. |
Habit 3: Try Another Person’s Life
Sinead was born with the genetic condition called ‘achondroplasia’ inherited from her dad: her mom is average height. The oldest of five children, she is the only one who is a little person.

She asks: “what does it mean to be a little person, and how does it affect me?” All people with achondroplasia have short stature. The average height of an adult male is 4ft 4in - the average height for adult females is 4ft 1in. She is 3 ft 5 in. Typical features are average-size trunk, particularly short upper arms and thighs and a limited range of motion at the elbows.

The biggest challenges she faces are mainly due to the physical environment, as she lives in a world which was not built for her. Light switches and door handles are usually out of reach and there is quite a lot of pre-planning involved before travelling somewhere for the first time, and bathrooms can be difficult. The height of the lock on the door and being able to reach the washbasin, soap dispenser and hand-dryer all pose difficulties.

Imagine if you had to live in a world that was solely constructed for her. How would you manage?

She says: “my height was not a deterrent, and it did not make me the person I am. It was like my long brown hair or my brown eyes – a physical characteristic that differentiated me from quite a percentage of the population.”

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Habit 4: Listen Hard! Open Up!

Do you know who Robert Greenleaf is? He was the founder of the modern Servant leadership movement. Servant leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. He once said, “Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.”

There are two traits required for being an empathic conversationalist. One is to master the art of radical listening. Radical listening is our ability to be present to what’s really going on within—to the unique feelings and the needs a person is experiencing in that very moment. One of the biggest reasons people don’t listen is that they don’t think it’s important, unless they decide it is. Actively focus, watch your signals, practice pausing, stop selling and confirm what you heard. Being a radical listener will help us do better work and have better relationships and that is pretty radical.
Habit 3: Try Another Person’s Life

What I already do well.  How I could be better.

Habit 4: Listen Hard! Open Up!

What I already do well  How I could be better
Habit 5: Inspire Mass Action and Social Change

We typically assume empathy happens at the level of individuals, but HEPs understand that empathy can also be a mass phenomenon that brings about fundamental social change. Empathy can be a powerful tool in convincing us to care deeply about the suffering of distant strangers, whether they are drought-stricken farmers in Africa or future generations who will bear the brunt of our carbon-junkie lifestyles.

Canada’s pioneering Roots of Empathy, has benefited over half a million school kids. Its unique curriculum centers on an infant, whose development children observe over time in order to learn emotional intelligence—and its results include significant declines in playground bullying and higher levels of academic achievement.

Habit 6: Develop an Ambitious Imagination

We tend to believe empathy should be reserved for those living on the social margins or who are suffering. This is necessary, but it is hardly enough.

We also need to empathize with people whose beliefs we don’t share or who may be “enemies” in some way. If you are a campaigner on global warming, for instance, it may be worth trying to step into the shoes of oil company executives—understanding their thinking and motivations—if you want to devise effective strategies to shift them towards developing renewable energy.

A little of this “instrumental empathy” (sometimes known as “impact anthropology”) can go a long way. Empathizing with adversaries is also a route to social tolerance.
Habit 5: Inspire Mass Action and Social Change

What I already do well.

How I could be better.

Habit 6: Develop and Ambitious Imagination

What I already do well

How I could be better
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