



Empathy

That car would not let me merge on the highway this morning! My boss didn't say hello to me when he came in today! That lady was rude to me in the grocery store! I texted her 10 minutes ago and she still hasn't texted back.

Whenever we experience one of these situations it's too easy for us to begin telling ourselves a story that vilifies the other person. It takes practice and willingness to think of alternative stories; stories that can lead us to empathy.

Perhaps the person on the highway was racing to the emergency room where their loved one was just taken. Perhaps your boss just had a fight with his spouse before coming in to work. Perhaps the lady in the grocery store is raising her grandchildren while caring for her aging spouse. Perhaps your friend that didn't text you back when you thought she should've is spending time with her mother or children.

Truly caring for others with sensitivity and social awareness to the point that you can understand what they are feeling and thinking is empathy. This cannot be done without actively listening for understanding. It cannot be done if we continue to tell ourselves stories that make us the victim.

When you take time to listen to other people's viewpoints and reasons for feeling or acting the way they do, you'll be able to respond with understanding and empathy. You'll be able to emotionally read others, understand how they are feeling, and then support them.

Through the practice of empathy you will have stronger interpersonal relationships and grow your circle of influence.

Things to practice: When someone shares their story with you respond by repeating it back to them in your own words in a format like, "It sounds like you feel (share the emotions you saw or heard from them) about (their story)."

Let them reply, then you can ask permission to offer advice. This simple practice of letting others know you heard them and you understand their feelings opens the door for healthy dialogue and lets them know you care.