Productive Conversations Trough Empathy
Stephanie Weaver and Lenore Knudtson, Pingora Consulting

Transcript

Melanie Reese>> Hello, I'm Melanie Reese, director of CADRE. Thank you so much for joining today's webinar, presented by Stephanie Weaver and Lenore Knudtson, entitled "Productive Conversations Through Empathy." Today's presentation is part of our continuing series of valuable CADRE webinars.

A few technical notes -- phone lines have been muted to minimize interruptions. Toward the end of the webinar, we will open up the line for questions. Please press pound-6 to unmute your phone and star-6 to mute it again. For best sound quality, we recommend using your telephone rather than talking through your computer audio. At any point during today's presentation, you may submit questions or comments into the Chat box located at the bottom right hand corner of your screen. CADRE staff will be monitoring Chat comments throughout the webinar.

We are so fortunate to have two esteemed presenters today. Let me first introduce Stephanie Weaver; Stephanie is a principal partner in Pingora Consulting, LLC, and offers more than 12 years of experience in state education agency administration, strategic planning, fiscal control and program improvement. She is a national expert and a valuable resource on all matter pertaining to special education, school finance and refining education systems. She is regularly called to work with school districts and states on programmatic finance, data analysis, legal compliance and systems management. She previously served as a deputy director of special education at the Wyoming Department of Education. She earned a national reputation as a leader in special education, and she has been invited to participate in several national workgroups focused on special education policy and technical assistance. Ms. Weaver holds a bachelor's of science in Business Management with honors from Montana State University at Bozeman, and a master's of Business Administration from the University of Wyoming. Ms. Weaver has expanded her knowledge and skills to include certification as a mediator. She incorporates the facilitation and team building expertise of a professional mediator across all aspects of the profession, making her an expert in working with diverse groups and building cohesive workplace teams.

Joining Stephanie is Lenore Knudtson. After earning a bachelor's degree and a master's of Science and Education, Ms. Knudtson began her career as a school psychologist, working with school teams, parents and children. This ignited a passion for special education, and improving the lives of children and young adults with disabilities. Ms. Knudtson's journey led her to law school. She earned Juris doctorate degree with honors from William Mitchell College of Law, while working full-time as a psychologist with significantly challenged young adults. After law school, Ms. Knudtson began a new career involving special education law and substantive compliance. She works with states, school districts, parents and advocates across the nation. Currently, Ms. Knudtson's career has culminated in a rich blend of issues, focusing on education and dispute resolution. She serves as a mediator, complaint investigator and hearing officer in several states. Ms. Knudtson provides professional development in education and

dispute resolution across the nation. In 2012, Ms. Knudtson joined Stephanie Weaver to create Pingora Consulting, offering an array of services focusing on education, dispute resolution and systems building and legal compliance.

Thank you both so much for joining us today. I'll now turn it over to the two of you.

Stephanie Weaver>> Thank you, Melanie. This is Stephanie Weaver, and Lenore and I would like to thank everyone for joining us this morning, or this afternoon, whichever time zone you might be in. We want to express our appreciation to CADRE for the opportunity to guide this discussion regarding a topic we've become increasingly more interested in, and its connection to the work that we do, and that's empathy. Today we are going to talk specifically about empathy and its ability to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, satisfaction and really productivity of team work and personal conversations.

As a starting point, we are going to begin with a definition of empathy, and kind of our working definition of empathy. That is that, simply stated, empathy is a recognition of others' feelings, listening to the causes of those feelings and being able to participate in the person's experience without becoming part of it. It really means that there is no ownership. In empathy, you're not expressing ownership; rather, you're a participant. Empathy is really a great liberator, and we're going to talk about a few different ways. Empathy is understanding the feelings of another, and again, it's without experiencing those feelings as your own. And it's liberating because you can demonstrate compassion without really infringing on your own beliefs, or having it be -- having it to change your values.

So let's think about the ability to understand the feelings of another. And we want to make this kind of distinction of empathic concern, and then understanding that empathic concerns means that you aren't sharing the same painful feelings as another person; that might be sadness, it might be fear, it might be anger. But you're not yourself sharing that bad experience; rather, concern is an acknowledgement that the person is having a difficult time. But it isn't yours to fix. You don't have to have the answer. You're not expected to provide the answer; you're concerned, acknowledging that the person is having a difficult time.

There's an interesting piece --

Lenore Knudtson>> [INAUDIBLE]. Can you hear me? I'm sorry, this is Lenore.

Stephanie Weaver>> Yes.

Lenore Knudtson>> This is the part where I start getting really excited, so forgive me for jumping in. But this journey that we've been on, learning about empathy and the difference between empathy and sympathy, and empathy's role in teams and the team process has gotten us really excited. This is one of the reasons empathy is so powerful, because you can demonstrate empathy, compassion, caring, kindness without inserting yourself into the story, the concerns. You don't have to feel what the other person is feeling. You don't have to have the same feelings in order to be able to be empathic. You can acknowledge that that person, in this moment, is in a tough place, without endorsing those feelings. That's what makes empathy

powerful. That's what makes it liberating. So go ahead, Steph. Sorry, I just had to jump in there.

Stephanie Weaver>> No, and I think that especially in the area of dispute resolution and that tension that sometimes arises as a result of working in these team projects, it's really, really powerful to have an empathic mindset when you enter into those conversations.

We wanted to share a little bit about this idea of, there is science that confirms this idea of empathy, and our bodies actually produce oxytocin. So our bodies react to this idea of our brains being empathic. And this oxytocin creates a sense of trust and cooperation and team collaboration, if when we lead with empathy we really are going to be in a position to reduce tension, to reduce conflict, to kind of get in front of those disagreements that might lead to more formal dispute. So it's just a really, really powerful way to improve conversations, improve teams. And it's supported by science.

The other piece is thinking about empathy as, you're kind of viewing it through the eyes of another. There's definitely an art to being able to see the world through someone else's eyes. The power in that is that if you're seeing it through the eyes of another, you can accept that the situation may have different meaning for that person than for you. It also helps sometimes make sense of the reason that the person is feeling the way they are in that given moment, when you think about it, that you're seeing it through their eyes, not necessarily through your filter or how you would react.

Lenore Knudtson>> Yes, there's another point to make here on this slide, and that is the last part of the last sentence, "and understand that his actions made sense to him." Again, that's part of the liberating piece. You don't have to, and you essentially can't, insert yourself into their story and feel what they're feeling at that moment. However, you can sort of relinquish the control and say, okay, I have empathy for you. I understand that you are having a tough moment right now. And I understand that this makes sense to you. It doesn't have to make sense to me. I only have to be able to liberate myself and acknowledge that this makes sense to you.

Stephanie Weaver>> Another really liberating piece is the fact that not to take it personally through empathy as a listener, because that's really what you are, is a listener. You're listening empathically. It's not about you. You can set aside your biases. You don't impose any judgment. It doesn't impose on your belief. It might not be the way that you would react, but it isn't about you. And I think that really also reduces the stress of the situation. You don't, as Lenore said earlier, it doesn't become part of your story, so you don't have to own it or take it personally. You're really an observer, looking at it through someone else's eyes.

We also know that empathy -- there's some training. We all have the capacity to exhibit empathy, but it's really a learned skill, or an attitude that we take on as part of our life. We try to -- when we come into contact with people, people who receive empathic training, they communicate, understand other people's experiences or feelings, but you have to be trained to do that, in order to really express empathy to the fullest. This slide talks about just some really interesting research out there, specifically in the medical field, but this is about doctors, medical

professionals who had received empathy training, and their interaction with patients and expressing empathy as they interacted with patients. I think common sense sometimes, or intuition would tell us that, oh my gosh, if they were having to deal with patients who things -- they were having hard feelings, that that would be a heavy burden to take on as a physician or a medical professional.

But really, when you do well with those things that we talk about, when you listen empathetically and you don't own an issue as your own, it actually -- they had decreased stress levels, because they were not taking those problems on as their own. They were just observing with empathy. However, you can see the flipside of that coin, and that's with those individuals that lack the training or having refined the skill of empathy. They often assume that burden, and that stress becomes their stress. And researchers have gone so far as to call this "second-hand stress." This research that we're talking about specifically is in the medical field, but I think we can all think about times that we have participated in internal types of teams, or on IEP teams, or conversations with family and thinking about, were we listening empathetically? Or were we actually owning the stress, owning the emotion as our own and really taking on that second-hand stress.

Lenore Knudtson>> I'm sorry Steph.

Stephanie Weaver>> Go ahead.

Lenore Knudtson>> This area of research, I just have to jump in here, because it gets me all jazzed up. There is a large body of research that has taken place primarily in the medical field. But it also takes place in the education field. It is clearly demonstrating that people in very stressful positions, like new doctors, who are learning how to be a doctor and also learning how to be a caregiver at the same time, they have a tendency to take on those concerns and that stress becomes toxic. With the research that's coming out now, those doctors have been provided with a specific curriculum and empathy training. That empathy training increases their ability to be empathic listeners, to be empathic caregivers, without moving to sympathy, without becoming involved in that person's trauma. When they're able to do that, they have more job satisfaction, and their stress levels decrease. So let's think about this in the education framework for just a little bit. And the research supports this as well.

There is research, for instance, that talks about and demonstrates that teachers who have gone through empathy training, again it's specific training to increase one's level of empathy, to allow them to be an empathic listener, an empathic teacher, without getting, again, owning that person's, the other person's feelings or thoughts. Teachers who are able to do that, studies support the conclusion that, for instance, suspension rates go down, because again, the teachers are not involved in that raw, angry moment in the same way. They are able to demonstrate empathy without getting involved in the moment, without personalizing that situation. And their stress levels go down, suspension rates go down, school climate goes up. So there's this whole body of research that's emerging now, about this notion that when people are trained in the concept of demonstrating empathy rather than sympathy, their stress levels

decrease, their job satisfaction increase. And this concept, this notion of second-hand stress becomes non-existent. If you could just think for a moment of all the places in your life where you sort of take on the role [INAUDIBLE] and allow second-hand stress to become part of your life, all the ways that having an empathic approach to the stress of others would allow you to reduce that second-hand stress.

I think it's a super interesting body of research that's just beginning to come out. But this is where we really learn about job satisfaction, stress reduction and longevity -- really important topics in the education field today.

So sorry about -- I don't know if you can see that or not, but Steph, while you talk, I'm going to try and change this view. So bear with me, folks, while Steph is talking about the next slide.

Stephanie Weaver>> Lenore alluded that there is a difference between empathy and sympathy. It's subtle, but it's super important to understand that difference between empathy and sympathy. As we said several times already, empathy is that you understand the feelings, but you don't necessarily share them or own them, or have to let them consume you, versus that sympathy is where you share the feelings of another, and you make them your own. And Lenore talked about some of the unfortunate results of sympathy can be -- it increases stress, it causes burnout, it's overwhelming. It feels like a burden, and people just get worn down when that approach is one of sympathy rather than empathy. So it's important to think about how to build empathy, and know that it's a learned skill, and it needs to be practiced.

Lenore Knudtson>> Yeah. Another way to conceptualize the difference between empathy and sympathy, is empathy is, again, allowing and embracing someone's ability to express their own feelings, but not necessarily sharing them, being empathic in the moment that this person is having a tough time, without saying, I would be bothered by this, too. Or, this would hurt me as well, or, I understand why you feel that way. Because again, the powerful piece about empathy is that you can demonstrate compassion and understanding, empowering someone to take control of their own emotional health without inserting yourself in their story, without owning the reason that they feel that way. When you move to sympathy and you start saying things like, "I would feel that way, too," "I understand why you feel that way," "It would make me mad as well," "I hate it when people do that to me" -- all of those things move you towards sympathy, and you are now taking on the toxic stress of being in that moment with them. You're starting to own their reasons for feeling bad.

Stephanie Weaver>> And I think along those same lines, Lenore, it's that difference, too, between acknowledging and endorsing.

Lenore Knudtson>> Yes.

Stephanie Weaver>> In the world that we live in, working with colleagues, with students, with parents in dispute resolution, just that huge difference between trying to get tension, conflict resolved and the difference between acknowledging this emotion, versus endorsing this emotion, has a significant effect on getting to a positive resolution or outcome.

So a little bit about, as we said, building empathy -- it's learned, it must be practiced. It includes that you have to have some self-understanding, some way to check the pulse of yourself in building this empathy. You have to have understanding of others and those around you. And then you also have to recognize that there is a non-verbal empathy that has to be acknowledged. You have to pay attention to that in order to build empathy and improve your skillset.

So thinking about this self-understanding, giving yourself permission to experience the feeling, that it's okay that you have the feelings that you do, and that you, again, that you self-check, you keep track of kind of your own emotions and your health. It helps you to have a better understanding and interact with a person if you kind of have that recognition and acceptance of your own emotions. So keeping yourself in check so that you're in a position not to cross over, or to kind of creep into that more sympathetic ownership of somebody else's emotions. So giving yourself permission to experience the feeling, but also having some self-regulation about those feelings and emotions that you're feeling. You need to be able to find perspective in the moment, whatever that moment is, thinking about what it would be like from somebody else's perspective. So how does the situation appear to the other person? Almost stepping outside of your reaction to it, thinking about it from the situation from another person's perspective, and being willing to accept that somebody else's why might be different from yours. But it doesn't infringe upon your belief or your values; rather, you are able to get to the point that you can value diverse perspectives and people that are different from you. Because we don't own that perspective. It's not your perspective.

This is another element we've talked a lot about, kind of the demonstration or the verbal listening -- those pieces. But it has to work in harmony with this non-verbal empathy, and how we respond non-verbally, and the signals and the cues that it requires. So when people are speaking, when you're listening, think about it. Where are your eyes? What's your body position? What are your non-verbal cues? Because these non-verbal cues are the first things that people see. It's one of the easiest ways to spot when someone's being disingenuous, or they're a fraud. They're not necessarily truly empathic. They're just kind of putting on a front. So the non-verbal element and the way that we respond is really important as well.

Melanie Reese>> Stephanie and Lenore, we have a question. Yeah, we have a question. Someone would like to have the presenters give an example of an empathetic response and a sympathetic response to a person in crisis.

Lenore Knudtson>> Sure. A little bit of context -- and I'm just going to make it up for the purpose of this response here -- but let's say you have a person who is particularly angry about care that their child has received in school. They don't feel as though the school cares about them. They don't feel as though their child has been taken care of the way that they see appropriate. Maybe it's a safety issue. So this parent might be expressing some very strong feelings about, maybe the teacher hates my child, or the teacher's incompetent, or something to that effect. Then an empathic response might be that, for instance, it's always easier, especially when you're new at this concept, to go verbal, to describe what you're seeing, rather than endorsing what they're feeling. So an empathic response might be something like, "I can see

that this is really an emotional moment for you," and you might offer a suggestion. "Would you like to take a break? Should we move on to the next item on our agenda? Should we circle back to this a little bit later?" It can be very helpful to describe what you're seeing, and then prompt with some kind of question or probe. That would be an empathic response.

A sympathetic response that inserts you into their story and starts endorsing why this parent is so upset is, "I can understand why that would make you so mad. It would really upset me too, if the teacher made my child stand against the wall for recess every day," or, "If the teacher left the classroom alone and my child got hurt." Whatever's happening in that story, saying that you understand, saying that you would feel the same way. Saying that I don't blame you for feeling that way -- all of those are sympathetic response, because it's moving you to owning those strong feelings. In order to be able to say you understand, that you would feel the same way, that you don't blame that person, you're saying I would own it and react the same way. That's a sympathetic response. You want to stay on the side of empathy, which allows you to be very respectful and compassionate, that this is a tough situation to work through, without endorsing what this person is feeling, is actually correct. We don't have to own it.

Melanie Reese>> That's really helpful, thank you. There's a follow-up questions. Do you have any suggestions for keeping responses empathetic when responding to phone calls? It seems it's even more difficult when you don't have the non-verbal element visually present.

Lenore Knudtson>> Yeah, that's a really good point in our digital world. I agree with that. When you don't have the perspective and the context that goes along with a face-to-face conversation, it can be really difficult. You cannot describe what you see, but you can describe what you hear. If I'm involved in a phone conversation when somebody is getting upset on the other end -- and again, Steph and I are both mediators, and we're both facilitators. Some of the pre-work that we might do with this allows us to experience that raw emotion, most of the time over the phone as we're getting ready to convene a mediation or facilitation. And I handle it very much the same way, with -- "Something just changed here. Your voice is rising. You seem to be upset. This seems to be a difficult moment for you. Would you" -- and again, follow up. "Would you like to set this aside and come back to it? Would you like to talk about something else? Would you like to take a break and reconvene this conversation, maybe when you have a support person there with you?" You can do any number of things, but you're going to use the same strategy of talking about what you're hearing rather than endorsing why this person's getting upset. When you move to the endorsement of why, you have inserted yourself into their story, and you're owning it.

Any other questions?

Melanie Reese>> Not at this time. Oh -- I spoke too quickly. I spoke too quickly. Here's another. As a psychologist, I know the power of empathy one-on-one. As someone who's attended many mediations, I've observed that verbal and non-verbal empathetic responses to one party can cause the other party to misinterpret the mediator as being biased. How do you handle that? Do you educate all parties beforehand that signs of empathy, like head nods, do not imply agreement?

Lenore Knudtson>> Yeah, really, really good question. I think that -- I wouldn't necessarily explain it at that idiosyncratic level. But I may very organically explain it in the mediation, and also one of the most powerful tools that you can use to guard against this is parity. That you make sure your non-verbal empathy and your body language is -- you're using parity with both participants. So if you're using head nodding with one, you use head nodding with another. I try not to use head nodding for the very reason that you're talking about -- it can be perceived as an endorsement, whether I intend it that way or not. I tend to use charting as the tool, rather than nodding. I'm charting just pertinent words, phrases, as opposed to whole sentences. Charting gives me the opportunity to collect my thoughts. Charting gives me the opportunity to increase the collective memory of the group, because I'm writing down important points. I'm doing this very transparently. Again, parity becomes incredibly important. So you want to make sure that your non-verbal empathy is provided essentially equally, on par with both sides, to avoid appearing to endorse, whether you intend to or not.

Melanie Reese>> There was another question. Please repeat what you said about the endorsement of why. Somebody missed that.

Lenore Knudtson>> Sure. So when somebody, again, is having a difficult moment; it may be in mediation, it could be in facilitation, it could be an IEP team meeting, it could be in a staff meeting -- it doesn't really matter the context. When that person is perceiving that they've been treated unfairly or that their child has been treated unfairly, the notion that you can acknowledge that they're expressing a strong emotion, that they feel strongly about something, that this is a difficult topic for them to share, whatever it might be -- you can do that without endorsing the why behind their emotion. So going back to the child example. The parent does not believe that the teacher treats their child fairly, for whatever reason. If you say, "I can see how it would look that way," you have now endorsed and given credence to the fact that, yes, this teacher must be treating the child unfairly. That's not your call to make in that moment. Most importantly, you don't need to endorse the why behind their emotional angst, in order to be empathic. You can be very respectful, very compassionate, without owning that, yeah, I agree, I think this teacher treated this child unfairly. You don't have to go there. It's not helpful to go there. You want to be able to leave people better than you found them, leave situations better than you found them, by engaging in an empathic response without endorsing the underlying reasons that this person is upset.

Melanie Reese>> There are a couple of questions about charting. What does that look like? What phrases do you chart?

Lenore Knudtson>> Yeah, and this we could do a whole other session on charting, trust me, because I see it as one of the most powerful tools in the team process; whether it's an IEP team meeting, whether it's mediation or any other kind of dispute resolution, facilitation, staff meeting -- whatever it might be. I use charting, and I'm doing it on a whiteboard, on chart paper, on some kind of medium that's visible to everyone. I'm picking out words that I can work with, that I can go back and probe against. It could be going back to the example, again, I mentioned again a concern about recess -- I might chart "recess" up there, so that it's a collective reminder to the whole group that we might need to come back and look at, what does recess look like?

Are there opportunities for more supports? Really exploring through probing what some of the issues are about it, rather than just the raw emotionality about it. Saying something is unfair, or that it's not working is not enough to be able to look at potential resolution. You have to be able to probe deeper than that. So I'm charting just particular words that allow me, then, to come back and probe. What about this? This was mentioned as something we need to come back to. It also allows me, if I've got somebody who is so enmeshed in their moments, in their own stories, that they're not ready to move on -- I can use the chart and say, "We've got it up here. We can address it right now, or we can come back to it later. What is your preference?" So that you kind of get that person ready to move on and stay forward and start talking about solutions. So charting is just an incredibly powerful tool. Probably deserves a whole lot more time than we're going to be able to give it today, but it allows you to control your non-verbal behavior, and also have a tool that gives you organizational purpose. It becomes very organic. It's not artificial. It's a tool that gives you organizational purpose.   Again, if you're -- go ahead, Steph.

Stephanie Weaver>> I was just going to say, too, it allows you to not let the emotion or that burden to become the story. Because you're not charting anger or disappointment, or the emotion that's being expressed. You're really charting what is the issue, or what is the topic that needs to be -- you need to dig deeper into. As Lenore said several times, you're going to leave yourself something up on that chart that you can work with, and a really strong emotion, or this expression is not what you're charting; rather, it's the piece that you can work with, the issue that needs resolved.

Lenore Knudtson>> Yeah, there's another example -- go ahead, Melanie.

Melanie Reese>> I'm just letting you know there's another question regarding addressing strong emotions and people being upset. I think it might be addressed later in your presentation, so we'll hold that. But go ahead.

Lenore Knudtson>> Okay. All right, so I think we're up to the continuum stuff. Stephanie?

Stephanie Weaver>> Yes, I'm here.

Melanie Reese>> Okay.

Stephanie Weaver>> The empathy continuum, we're going to explain it a couple of ways. And globally, what we're explaining is that there are different stopping points on this idea of empathy. Really thinking about focusing on behaviors. So kind of that ignorance stage. The behavior is that it's kind of, people don't know. They behave because they just don't know. And that selfishness, it's deliberate. It's a deliberate act. In different behavior, it just doesn't change. In sympathy, people express this behavior. They feel sorry. They have this expression of feeling sorry. Then empathy, this really takes -- people take time. The behaviors that they take time to understand the person that's expressing this life experience. So it also, on a more really direct level, is, your position on this empathy continuum is going to vary from situation to situation, depending on what your life situations or experiences have been in that situation that's being discussed. And sometimes it's easier to be more empathic if you've had -- depending on the

situations that you have experienced. I think the biggest thing is to recognize and be aware of where you are on that continuum.

So we want to give just a little example, kind of transitioning that to a situation-specific example, thinking about an IEP team who, maybe there's a proposal on the table, they're processing through a proposal for some sort of student service. So at that kind of point of ignorance, there may be people that don't really see that there's a problem. Then in that selfishness stage, it may be that there are people that, it has to be somebody's fault, that there's not enough of that service, or the service isn't working. Kind of that it must be somebody is doing something wrong, or someone's at fault. The indifference person on the team may be that there's a solution, and they just think it's okay. Like, what's wrong with the solution? The empathy, there's an emotion tied to it. It could be that -- using the example Lenore -- could be that one person thinks the other -- the teacher just isn't nice, isn't helpful, doesn't care about their child. Then you finally get kind of that empathic response. That's really where positive actions and positive changes can happen. If you think about it, you won't get a positive change until you really get to that empathic response. Getting stuck at those other places along that continuum delays any positive outcome that might result from the conversation.

Lenore Knudtson>> And this empathy continuum is also the focus of empathy training, because if you think about the purpose of empathy training is to get you operating from a place of empathy, which is much closer to achieving positive actions and interactions with people. As long as we stay over on the left side of this continuum, we're much more likely to have negative action. Again, this can be very fluid in the moment. It might be that roles at the table change at any different moment. But until we can get people operating from a position of empathy, we're much less likely to get lasting, positive interactions.

We're going to move on to emotional intelligence. This is a field that is relative new; it's not brand new, but we have talked about it more and more in relation to dispute resolution, and also education over the years. Emotional intelligence, or EQ versus IQ, emotional quotient versus intelligence quotient, very interesting concept in the education field. From the big picture, 30,000 foot view, we're talking about teams that demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence decrease stress for individual members and for the process itself. That turnover is reduced, because burnout is reduced. We increase our personal well-being, because we don't take on that second-hand stress, that toxic stress of others. Leadership is increased, because this is a demonstrated skill. Team performance is increased. When you can improve IEP teams on behalf of students with disabilities, you improve outcomes for kids with disabilities, and you decrease disputes. So you will improve decision-making overall.

This notion of EQ is really about your ability, capacity or skill to identify, assess and manage the emotions of oneself, others and the group. I want to caution you there about the word "manage" -- we don't mean that in terms of control. Don't think manage is synonymous with control. It is really about the ability to identify, assess and manage. You can manage the emotions of oneself, the others in the group, by giving an opportunity, for instance, to express and release, through probing, probing questions. Your acknowledgement that this is a tough moment, and then probing about what the group would like to do next, or what the individual would like to do

next. So don't think of manage as in the powerful element of under-the-thumb control. It's much, much broader than that.

It does require, and also lead to, this notion of authentic communication. Again, this is back into the world of the healthcare sciences, and the body of research that's developing there. These were caregivers in the medical field, and this study really went deep on what happens when empathy is inserted as the method of interacting, the mode of interacting, with people with chronic health conditions. So the first thing that they tried to teach and then query was, understanding the problem through another's point of view. Again, that's the perspective piece that we mentioned earlier. It doesn't mean that's endorsement. I means that, I understand that you are having a tough time handling this diagnosis, or pain management, or whatever it might be in the medical field. Recognizing and fully accepting the patient as a person. You can translate all of these things readily into the education system. Authenticity is that real honest expression, without hypocrisy. And I'll go one further -- without sarcasm. In my view -- and I've seen this play out hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times -- sarcasm has no place when we are dealing with the needs of a child, when we're dealing with dispute in general, because not everyone understands sarcasm the same way. Sometimes it comes up as hypocrisy. So what we're really hoping for through authenticity is this warm and unconditional positive recognition. Then self-exposure, meaning the staff person, the healthcare professional -- whoever it might be -- has the opportunity to report experiences from their personal perspective. Again, when you offer an empathic response, you don't have to agree or disagree with their perspective. It becomes very powerful. But these are the keys, the tools to authentic communication.

This notion, again, of understand versus manage -- empathy and emotional intelligence work together to produce long-lasting relationships. Think about how important this is in the educational field. A young person enters his school as a preschooler, and ages out at the age of 21 or 25 in some of our states -- that is a long relationship. We want it to be positive. We don't get there by intentionally or unintentionally making things worse by [INAUDIBLE] situations, by going to sympathy and making someone feel worse at the end of the meeting than they did at the beginning of a meeting. You get these long-lasting relationships through empathy and emotional intelligence, working together. Empathy allows the leader to understand what that person is feeling in the moment, without endorsing why they're feeling it. And emotional intelligence allows that person to communicate that understanding. It's not enough to just be an empathic observer without being able to communicate.

So we think about competency. I've got a little graphic up on the screen, and I like this graphic for a couple of reasons. It really is the deep interaction between emotional intelligence and empathy. But the reason that I really like it is, if you think about it, divide it in half. Half of this graphic is devoted to self-awareness and self-management. That means that as the professional at the table, you need to have your fingers on your pulse at all times. You need to build your skillset so that you have empathic training well within your skillset, that you have the capacity to engage empathically, that your EQ is high, and you can allow the team to benefit from your skill and training. Half of it is self-awareness. You need to know about your emotions at all times. That includes emotional self-control, adaptability, achievement orientation and

positive outlook. All of those things are as important to emotional intelligence and empathy as the other part, which includes social awareness of others, and situations, and also relationship management. And in the school system, there's hardly anything as important as relationship management, because we need to be able to work together as teams. We need to be able to manage tension before it gets to conflict, before it gets to full-on dispute. We need to have teams face forward, because there will almost always be another IEP team meeting on the horizon, another team meeting of some sort that we need to come together and have a positive, lasting relationship in order to be able to accomplish our work in the field of special education.

So just briefly here, we think about self-awareness -- that's the ability to understand one's own emotions, and their effects on their performance. This is your fingers on your pulse at all times. The self-management, the ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check -- this is your job as an empathic leader. Achievement orientation -- I think that the best way to describe achievement orientation is, stay forward-facing. The minute you turn and get sort of locked in on the bad events or the tension of the past, you are facing backwards, not forwards. And you are not in a position to make decisions for the future. Decisions that are made with a backward-facing focus tend to repeat the same mistakes, over and over again. When we can turn that group around through empathy, through emotional intelligence, through good team management skills, then we can help them face forward and make decisions. Facing forward is not the same thing as, "See it my way." Not that at all. It's turning the orientation forward-facing so that you don't keep repeating past mistakes. And again, this positive outlook is so important, particularly dealing with people's children. We can deal with a tough moment without having it destroy our relationship. We can deal with the tough moment, honor each other's perspective and move in with an empathic approach. In order to do that, we have to be flexible.

Social awareness -- again, this empathy comes in the ability to sense others' feelings and perspective, taking an active interest in what others feel and think, but not owning it. We do not need to own someone else's problems in order to be empathic. We don't need to endorse that. Then the ability to read the group's emotions -- as a leader at that team table, it's really important that you continually monitor yourself and your group. Loved the question from the psychologist about the effect that nodding might have on the other participants. You have to continually assess that organizational awareness of, wait a minute, I may just have inadvertently appeared to endorse this notion, this idea, at the expense of the other participant. I need to back up a little bit and make sure that I have demonstrated parity so that both sides know I'm encouraging dialog, I'm not endorsing.

Relationship management -- this is a little more complex, especially in our setting. But certainly think about this from a staff meeting perspective, a building team level perspective, from a professional, a PLC, a learning community -- people that have to work together for a common objective. Be aware that you have the ability to be a positive impact on others. If you're going to go to a meeting and be backward-facing, chances are, others will follow. If you're going to go to a meeting and be forward-facing, and say yes, we've got these issues, we've got these tense moments, we've got these difficulties, but let's face forward and work through them. You can help people do that through coaching and mentoring, guiding them along. I would say for each and every one of us, you on the line have already demonstrated a willingness and an

awareness about the importance of increasing your EQ, about being an empathic leader. So you are, essentially, one of the leaders when it comes to conflict management. Be inspirational about it, and then again, when it comes to teamwork, your shared goal -- that's a very forward-facing concept. Not backward-facing, but forward-facing. Makes sure that you have a shared goal, that you use parity to encourage people's active participation, that your body language is in harmony with your words so that you're authentic in your demonstration of empathy.

This concept of "lean in" -- as a leader, lean in. What would happen if more leaders were of the mindset to know a little more about the people at the table, care a little more about their needs and showcase their strengths to give them opportunities for success? This does not mean that you capitulate or give in. This may mean that you lean in and allow somebody to shine for a few moments, and then still face forward and say, okay, we can use this energy to build towards our shared goal. It doesn't mean that at the end of the meeting, only one person gets to shine.

Know more -- know what's most important to each of the team members. One of the ways, Steph and I teach a lot of facilitation courses, a lot of dispute resolution courses. And we are staunch believers in the use of the living agenda. It is made with multiple participants so that you can know in advance what is most important. You can be flexible and fluid, and probe, probe, probe to find out what is actually most important, what is the shared goal of the group. And then care more. Care enough to become empathically-trained. Care enough to increase your emotional intelligence. Showcase more. Look for opportunities to build on success, to be forward-facing.

This next concept, to me, it's critical, but it's big. It's really big. You have to think about it globally. We're talking about circles of concern. In order to be able to have that conversation, I first want to talk about the space of change, because when you interject this notion of this space of change into your meetings, you start building mutual respect. You start building understanding of different people's perspective. You create an environment that's safe for people to express what they're thinking. It promotes group participation. When you offer this space of change, that people might come away from there thinking or feeling differently about a topic, about an issue, then you are promoting group participation. You're turning that group and facing them forward, and saying, "I want to hear your voice." Then again, as an offshoot to that as a really critical component is that the leader is mindful of who is in his circle of concern, and continually looks for ways to expand it. That's how you build the space of change.

Expanding your circle -- very intentional. You create and foster the space of change through widening, growing your circle of concern. Because that's human, and there's a multiple of research to support this. Just look at what happens in your communities and in your neighborhoods. We are predisposed to empathize with others in our own social group; people who look like us, people who sound like us, people who think like us. We are predisposed to say, yep, that person's in my circle. But because circles can also be confining, we have people who are outside of our circle. It may be somebody with whom I'm not at all familiar. It may be somebody that has angered me in the past, to the point where I don't really want to meet with them again. It could be somebody that I don't share their concerns, I don't share their language.

Whatever it might be, as leaders, we have to be very intentional about expanding that circle of concern. You do it through empathy. Allow people in your circle who may disagree with you. And that's very hard to do. Allow people in your circle who don't look like you, act like you, talk like you, sound like you. But when you can, expand that circle, and be very intentional about it. You're creating the space of change, and it is liberating. Put this in the IEP team context, and maybe you've met with somebody over and over again, a parent and a school meeting together over and again. Maybe they've been to due process and back again. It's really difficult to have that person in your circle of concern, because you have been locked in dispute or disagreement for so long. When you intentionally -- if you're empathy -- again, not sympathy, but empathy -- bring that person into your circle of concern, and recognize that there have been tough moments, lots of disagreements, high emotions in the past. But allow that person in your circle of concern, and say, "Today we're going to face forward." It is liberating. It's very hard for somebody to be angry when you do that.

Stephanie Weaver>> Lenore, and I just want to jump in and kind of connect that back to some of the earlier discussion about some of that goes back to not owning it. By approaching it through empathy, it's not that you're in agreement. It's not that your values or your beliefs have changed. But you can see it through the eyes of another person. You can -- and I'm blanking on the exact wording right at this moment -- but you can understand why that person made that decision at that point in time, based on the information, the perspective that they had. So I think that also allows you to not personalize some of that emotion and that tension that has existed in the past, and may allow you to expand that circle of concern.

Lenore Knudtson>> This notion of zoom in -- this means nothing more than listen very closely to the people in your immediate circle. In our world, it's probably at an IEP team meeting table, or a staff table, or dispute resolution, mediation table. Zoom in and listen closely. But then at the same token, the same time, you don't want to stay in the micro, you want to make sure that you also zoom out because you want to take in the big picture. Consider many perspectives of the people that you interact with. That allows you to be personalized. You want to zoom in to be able to let people know you're there, you're listening, you're giving them your undivided attention. You're going to pay close attention and you're going to zoom out and allow other perspectives to come into your circle. You're going to consider other ways of thinking about the same situation. You want to make sure that you include those who are vulnerable, as you zoom in [INAUDIBLE] from their perspective.

So moving onto productive conversation stuff -- I think we have about five or so minutes before we're supposed to open it up. So if we can do this really quickly.

Stephanie Weaver>> Absolutely. We just wanted to kind of wrap up this idea of empathy and tie it back to conversations that as a lot of us on the line, those productive conversations that we have either in school communities, IEP teams, in formal dispute resolution or informal dispute resolution, thinking about the characteristics of those productive conversations. We talked about a lot of these, they've been woven in throughout the conversation. One, that they're goal driven. Making sure there's a common understanding of what needs to be accomplished.

Relationships -- making sure that there's been time as either prior to the meeting or during the meeting, that there's time spent on development of the relationships and the connectedness between the participants, whether that's an internal team meeting, or an IEP meeting, or parents in school, taking time to develop those relationships.

Another characteristic is effective communication. And we've talked about that communication happens in many different ways. It's the effective verbal communication, as well as non-verbal communication, written communication -- all of those different pieces, that there's an effective way for people to have a common understanding, understand the emotion in that communication. Lenore has mentioned this several times, but we are strong proponents of the idea of productive conversations, or forward-facing. They don't dwell and look at that -- take that backwards approach to going through all of the details and facts that led up to this conversation; rather, they're forward-facing in the here and now. What is this group going to come together to accomplish, and move forward? Then finally, that participants in these conversations come with open-mindedness, and that they have a willingness to bend. This starts with some of the strategies that are on the screen at this point. It's that elimination of mind chatter. What we mean by that is, having the ability to kind of set aside some of the assumptions, some of the judgments that walk into a room with us, so eliminating your own mind chatter as you engage in these conversations. We talked about building an agenda. Again, this isn't an agenda in isolation, this is together building an agenda that people can understand, that people use that feel that is representative of the things that need to be accomplished during that meeting.

Actively listening -- these are all of the things that as dispute resolution practitioners, as team members, in relationships, all of those skills that we use to demonstrate active listening, whether that's reflecting back to individuals, body language, acknowledgement -- all of those different pieces. That difference between listening and hearing, that we're not, as we're listening, we're not preparing our response, we're actually listening for understanding.

This ask questions -- this is a big one for Lenore and I. In lots of our trainings, one of the guiding principles is this idea of ask, don't tell. It is not the fixer, we're not the person with a hundred percent of the answers. Rather, it's this idea of through probing questions and being interested in the other individuals at the table, we can get to a better resolution. Then finally, a strategy that we need to be cognizant of, and recognize as part of conversations is that as individuals in conversations, we need the opportunity to express emotion, to express ideas, maybe to release some of that emotion, and then the opportunity to repair so that we can come back into that conversation and be an active participant.

Lenore Knudtson>> I think we're at the point now of opening it up to some more questions. We really want you to think about how empathy might influence your next conversation, and some tools, some skills that you can take into your next conversation -- whatever context that may be in. So Melanie, I don't know if you have any questions in queue?

Melanie Reese>> There are. There are five questions, so we'll get through as many as we can. The first question, how do you communicate that, with an upset parent, that you want to be

empathetic without having them be offended by guessing that they're having a strong emotion? Some individuals may be upset by someone assuming that they're having strong emotions.

Lenore Knudtson>> I'm not sure I completely understand the question, but I will respond this way. There are no pet answers, there are no pet phrases. You can't just have a cheat sheet of empathic responses and tick them off one by one. It's very organic in the moment. You can, again, one of the ways that you can increase your accuracy and reduce your margin of error is to talk about what you're seeing, rather than what you're assuming. Then to follow it up with probing. I guess my response is, you have to respond organically in the moment to what you're seeing, not any one set of responses based on your assumption.

Stephanie Weaver>> Okay, then I would follow that up just a little bit with, Lenore had mentioned talking about that their reaction had changed from maybe how they had responded earlier in the meeting. That's not necessarily calling it out as a strong emotion, it's just that it's different than it was before, and that you noticed it. You were paying attention, so just asking about that.

Melanie Reese>> Okay. How about empathetic responses when dealing with multi-cultural families? Are there any differences?

Stephanie Weaver>> Yeah, because it means different things to different people. Culture is a huge overlay in all of this. And to the extent that you're able, you need to learn about, we have a great example in some of our training about parents or grandparents who is of Asian descent, and he nods repeatedly throughout this conversation, and the school assumes that it is sort of tacit agreement, implicit agreement. And it's not, it's a cultural recognition or a sign of respect. So to the extent that you're able, you have to educate yourself about that going forward. One of the ways that you get through some of those cultural barriers is to ask lots of questions, and to read people's body language. Checking in to find out if it means the same thing to people. What does that look like for you? If this were implemented, what would that mean for Sally? So again, going visual, and then checking for understanding. Is this how you see it as well? You can't erase the cultural barriers, but you can minimize the effect of the cultural barriers by doing a lot of probing and checking in for common understanding.

Melanie Reese>> We have about seven or eight more questions. Unfortunately, our time is limited. One option would be, we could keep the presentation open and question could be answered in the Chat box after it closes, or I'm open for suggestions on --

Stephanie Weaver>> We can keep going.

Melanie Reese>> Or we can keep going. Why don't we go ahead and keep going, but I'll go ahead, for those people who were planning to be done at 12:45 Pacific Time, that we go ahead and announce the upcoming webinars and let people get to the surveys if they want to. And if Lenore and Stephanie, if you're game for answering some more questions, we could keep going.

Stephanie Weaver>> Sure, I've got some time.

Melanie Reese>> Okay. Well, for those folks who are going to be shutting off, thank you so much for joining us today. It's really important to us that you give us feedback. You'll see on the screen there there's a link for a brief Survey Monkey survey to evaluate today's webinar. We would very much appreciate you taking the time to do that. Our next webinar is going to be a joint effort by CADRE and the Center for Parent Information and Resources, CPIR, introducing new Part C, Dispute Resolution Resources for Families of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities. This seminar is going to be held on September 10th, at 12:00 Pacific Time. For information about that webinar, please look to our website at www.cadreworks.org, and we look forward to you joining us then.

With that, I'll go ahead and ask some of these other questions that are existing. And for those of you who are leaving, thank you for joining us.

Stephanie Weaver>> Yes, thank you, everyone. If you can stay on the line, that would be great. Otherwise, thank you for joining.

Melanie Reese>> So another question that came up, do you have any ideas or suggestions on how to convince school administrators to do empathy training with educators? Is there any research to show improved outcomes in schools that have implemented empathy training?

Lenore Knudtson>> That's two questions, actually. Going to the last question first, this whole body of research in schools with respect to empathy training is an emerging concept. There are a few studies out there that deal with, again, teachers and things like suspension rates, job satisfaction, turnover, that notion of toxic stress, you know, the second-hand stress being reduced through empathy training. But an administrative really needs to be receptive to the notion in order to be able to receive that research, and to dig in on it. So recognizing that administrators are in different places, I think in my experience, in much the same way that we have approached facilitation of the promising practice, because there's so much overlap with facilitation and the skills that we're talking about today -- look at some of that research, because that is powerful and impactful at the IEP team level. They're very, very similar skillsets. We talk about empathy all the time in the facilitation training, and being the facilitative skills leader at the table, not just an impartial third-party outside facilitator. I would say borrow from some of that research, it's very powerful about the improved outcomes for IEP teams. And again, this notion of, you can stay backward-facing, saying, "This is the way that we've always done it," or you can have a very forward-facing conversation about how to make improvements. Look at the early dispute resolution research as well. The earlier you can resolve tension, the less likely you are to proceed to a full-fledged dispute. I would venture to guess that every school system would be interested in reducing the change of heading to a due process hearing. No simple answer there, sorry.

Melanie Reese>> How would you suggest parents develop empathetic relationships with school staff? This parent wants to start to continue on a positive note with teachers. They haven't felt successful in past years.

Lenore Knudtson>> Again, go back through the presentation and look at building that empathic skillset from the very beginning. Sometimes if we have a long course of history that may have

been tension-filled or less than positive at times, it's hard to say, okay, tomorrow's a new day, and we're going to start this relationship now with an empathic approach. But you're going to have to do it through demonstration. Sometimes it can very, very, very much help to bring in a facilitator to start that process, because a facilitators going to use some of the same skills that you're going to use without the facilitator, once that meeting is over. You know, the purpose of facilitation is not only to get the team to consensus, it's to leave the team better than they're found, so that they have skills to use to meet together and have a successful, productive meeting without a facilitator. So changing the dynamic of that relationship would be important. And make sure that you look at different ways, and facilitation could be one of those ways to change the dynamic, and then to demonstrate that empathic approach from that point forward.

Melanie Reese>> Great. There's a question of if you have any suggested readings or books to continue learning about empathy.

Lenore Knudtson>> Tons of them. We have a bibliography for our facilitation group that we use, and we keep adding to it and adding to it. I'm sure I'll have to be reading far past retirement, in order to -- if I were starting the list tomorrow, I know I would have to read into my 80s in order to be able to read all of the books. But there's some really good ones for targeted conversations about empathy, targeted conversations about certain aspects of facilitated skills, getting beyond positions to interests. So I don't know, Steph, I'm thinking we could supplement our bibliography and share that with CADRE, and maybe they could put it out for us.

Stephanie Weaver>> That would be a great idea. Is that something we could do, Melanie?

Melanie Reese>> Absolutely.

Stephanie Weaver>> We can add it to the resources available.

Lenore Knudtson>> We can make that happen.

Melanie Reese>> Great. That actually addressed another question, asking if you had a particular resource or literature in mind for those who would like to learn more about professional development and teach your candidates building empathy skills. So as you compile that literature review, if you could focus on professional development for teachers, that would be great, if there's anything available that you know of.

Lenore Knudtson>> Absolutely.

Stephanie Weaver>> I will take advantage of that opportunity and just sort of give my plug and say, not only teacher professional development, I think that this is a topic that needs to be taught in teacher preparation program, so that teachers come to the job with this empathic skillset for their own sake, as well as the sake of the team and the classroom, because we want to make sure that teachers have job satisfaction, high emotional intelligence, that they don't take on second-hand toxic stress, because schools can be stressful environments for teachers. I would love to see it in a teacher prep program.

Melanie Reese>> That is the end of our questions. Again, thank you for being so thorough and spending a little bit of extra time with us. Thank you to those who've hung on to gather all of the information you can from these two wonderful presenters.

With that, again, please consider evaluating our presentation today.

Stephanie Weaver>> Thank you for the opportunity. I've really enjoyed it.

Lenore Knudtson>> Thank you. We appreciate it.

Melanie Reese>> Thank you again.

Lenore Knudtson>> Bye-bye.

Stephanie Weaver>> Bye.

Melanie Reese>> Bye, see you September 10th.