



News Release

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Empathy Not Sympathy

Tampa, Fla. (May 1, 2008). Folks often tend to confuse the words empathy and sympathy. While at times it is important to feel sympathy (i.e., that is feeling sorry for another), it is really empathy that achieves more positive and lasting results. Empathy is defined as the ability or capacity to identify with or vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person. We have often heard it described as having the ability to see life through another's lenses or to be able to "walk in another's shoes." Empathy significantly contributes to our ability to experience quality personal and professional relationships. Yet, for some reason, some find it difficult to develop empathy. This could occur because we tend to do "mind reading" and believe that we know the underlying motives of another person and then go on to attribute a negative interpretation to the other. Or, perhaps we believe that if we are empathetic others might view us as a "doormat" to be walked over.

Perhaps thinking about a personal life event and how you remember others responding to you might make the point clearer. How did you feel when all another said to you was "sorry." How did you feel when another seemed to really listen and "get" what you were experiencing? See what I mean? In the book, The Power of Resilience: Achieving Balance, Confidence, and personal Strength in Your Life, by Robert Brooks, Ph.D. and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., there is an entire

section on empathy. The authors offer some questions to consider:

- **How do I hope other people would describe me?**
- **How do I interact with these people so that it is likely that they would describe me in this way?**
- **How would these other people actually describe me?**
- **Is there a significant discrepancy between how I hope people would describe me and how they actually would describe me?**
- **If there is a discrepancy, how can I change my attitudes and behaviors so that others will begin to describe me in the way I would like to be described?**

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don't have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. So, if you are concerned about how you interact with others and would like to further develop empathy and are not sure where to turn or what you should do, help is just a phone call away.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.