

The Earned Life

Tags: [#empathy](#) [#human-relations](#) [#conversation](#) [#personal-leadership](#)

Creator: [marshall-goldsmith](#)

Dialogue

The every breath paradigm.

Thinking different about empathy:

For a personal quality bathed in such a brilliant glow of goodness, empathy certainly has a way of making us feel bad about ourselves. It asks too much of us. We feel guilty when we can't summon empathy for someone's suffering.

Paul Bloom from Yale who says any human capacity has pros and cons. He highlights in his work that empathy has his share of cons. What are the cons?

If you've ever come home and neglected your family members because you were still preoccupied with the empathic emotions you felt upon listening to a colleague's problems, you've seen the hazards of empathy overdone or done poorly.

A lot of people think about this and say, "That's good. I'm a good leader."

Empathy has few if any equals in reinforcing the [every breath paradigm], reminding us that we are an endless series of old and new versions of ourselves. Empathy's greatest utility is how effectively it reminds us to be present.

Criticism --> I'm not being authentic!

Empathy, is often thought of as understanding, feelings. What's the connection to presence?

The term "singular empathy" is prominent in your writing on this. What is singular empathy?

How do you shift to singular empathy?

If I could have only one index card to carry with me for the rest of my life, so I could look at it any time of day as a reminder of how I should behave to achieve an earned life, this would be the message I would write on it: Am I being the person I want to be right now?

The Buddha said, "Every breath I take is a new me." What's something you've changed your mind on in the recent past?

Quotes

Buddha was teaching that life is a progression of discrete moments of constant reincarnation from a previous you to a present you. At one moment, through your choices and actions, you may experience pleasure, happiness, sadness, or fear. But that specific emotion doesn't linger. With each breath, it alters, eventually vanishing. It was experienced by a previous you. Whatever you hope will happen in your next breath, or the next day, or the next year will be experienced by a different you, the future you. The only iteration of you that matters is the present you who has just taken a breath.

The most effective empathic gesture is the empathy of doing—when you go beyond understanding, feeling, and caring and actually take action to make a difference. It's the extra step, always exacting a cost in some way, that few of us are willing to take. And even when we do act on our empathic feelings, our well-intended actions can be excessive rather than a positive difference maker.

If empathy is the capacity to "walk a mile in another person's shoes," we might reasonably ask, "Why stop after a mile? Why not two miles? Why not forever?" This is one of my bones to pick with empathy. For a personal quality bathed in such a brilliant glow of goodness, empathy certainly has a way of making us feel bad about ourselves. It asks too much of us. We feel guilty when we can't summon empathy for someone's suffering.

I prefer the term singular empathy not only because it focuses our concern on a single person or situation, but also because it reminds us that each discrete opportunity to display our empathic powers is a unique and exceptional event. Singular empathy is unique to the moment; it changes with each situation. Sometimes it resembles the empathy of understanding, other times the empathy of feeling, caring,

or doing. The only constant with singular empathy is how it concentrates our attention on a single moment and therefore makes it singular for all involved. When you demonstrate singular empathy, you cannot be inauthentic

References