Twitter Thread by Success Theory

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What if too much empathy leads to bad decisions?

Is being too empathic holding you back as a leader?

///THREAD///



Empathy is the ability to feel what other people are feeling, and it is seen as one of the most essential leadership skills

Empathy indeed helps you see from the perspective of others and helps build stronger relationships

And all leaders need an element of this...

However,

Some psychologists estimate that one in five business leaders have such low empathy they can be considered psychopaths

We have all worked for one or at least worked in an organization that sees you as employee #2658, not an individual

All numbers

No heart...

Now I know you are not one of the psychopaths

You are like the vast majority of leaders

You have a big heart, and you want to do the right thing

But let's look at a typical example...

You have a team member

They've been with you years, your team loves them, and you can't imagine work without them

However, they're failing with the new demands of their role

People are starting to notice, some complaining to you

Results are being effected...

What do you do?

Well, the psychopath would have most likely already fired them years ago

But that is not you

You are empathic; you were trained to be so

You are now stalling, using your empathy because you like them...

But this is where you need to be careful, empathy's dark side is coming out to play

Empathy's significant weakness is that it can lead you to make terrible decisions

Here are three reasons for that...

1) Empathy for the familiar

If you have known someone for years, know them socially, or they could even be family members, you are more likely to have higher levels of empathy and forgiveness for bad performance

2) Empathy is biased

You're more likely to empathize with people who are like you. That's why we're more empathetic to our group's concerns than the concerns of other departments or organizations

3) Empathy can be the easy way out

You can't always trust your feelings to look out for the organizations best interests at large

Because you don't want the hassle of hiring and firing and making people sad, you put off making a decision

Now your thinking maybe a lack of empathy might be useful

Maybe I should be more of a psychopath

Woah, that did not take much of a push, did it?

But slow down there, Darth Vader

There is another way

And that is by using rational compassion...

You can be both rational and show compassion at the same time

Making decisions based on sound reason while showing compassion to those who are negatively affected

Are compassion and empathy the same thing

No...

Unlike empathy, compassion doesn't mean you truly feel how someone else feels

It does mean that you care and are trying to understand them

As a leader, you need to be compassionate while preserving an emotional boundary...

When it comes to making tough decisions like in the example earlier

You know it is not working out, and decisions need to made to change the
situation

You should do the right thing for the team and the organization while showing compassion and care for the individual...

That might mean letting them go (with a good package obviously)

Or it might mean a demotion and transfer to another team...

You will be in gut-wrenching situations often as a leader

There will be winners and losers

But you don't need to be a cold-hearted psychopath

Think about what is the rational thing to do for the team

Then how you can be compassionate to all involved

Do the right thing