

## Empathy – Not such a soft skill

Empathy comes from the Greek ‘Empatheia’ which literally means Em - I’m, Pathos - Feeling. In other words, it’s about putting yourself in the shoes of others, and really understanding how they are feeling.

A very simple form of empathy happens when you see someone yawn – we yawn back. When we see others doing something, we instinctively copy them. A bit like when we feed a toddler with a spoon - we will open our mouths as we get them to open theirs.

We can also identify the different emotions and can begin to react and feel similar emotions, even pulling similar facial expressions. This is when we take empathy to another level, really feeling what’s going on for others – stepping into their world!

## Patricia Moore

Patricia Moore was a product designer in the 70’s. She was fresh out of college, and the only woman designer amongst 350 men.

During a planning meeting to brainstorm a new refrigerator model, she asked a simple question: ‘Couldn’t we design the door so that someone with arthritis would find it easy to open?’



She was firmly told that ‘We don’t design for those people’.

She was annoyed by this response, and she decided to conduct what turned out to be one of the most radical empathy experiments of the 20th century.



This is also Patricia Moore, she spent the next 3 years immersing herself into how it would feel to be an 85-year-old woman.

She wasn’t just acting, but had latex on her face to become wrinkly, wore clouded glasses, plugged her ears and had her arms and legs taped with splints so she was unable to bend her limbs. She also wore uneven shoes, so she was forced to hobble with a stick.

She visited over 100 cities and tried to negotiate the world around her and truly understand the everyday obstacles that the elderly faced and how they were treated.

The result was that based on her experiences she was able to design a series of innovative products suitable for use by the elderly.

She is credited as the creator of inclusive design where products are designed for people of all abilities. She did many other great things, but this example shows that when we truly step into another's shoes, and then take action, we can make a real difference.

Now, we are not asking you to spend three years as an 85-year-old lady, and it may feel tough to be empathetic to someone who we find a challenge – although it will help the relationship immensely if we did!

Notes:

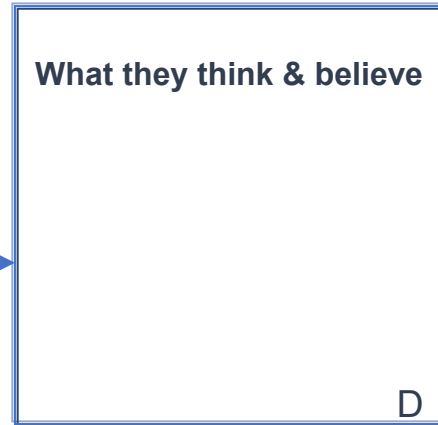


## Practicing Empathy

Me

The Other Person

How am I  
part of the  
problem?



How do I  
trigger  
thoughts and  
beliefs in

