

CASES & EXAMPLES OF WHY EMPATHY MATTERS

Presented By: Erin Kljaich & Mary Tamez



“That’s Not Fair”

Taxpayer Mr. Smith: *“Listings in my neighborhood are lower than assessments.”*

Deputy Assessor Jacob: *“Assessments are calculated based on sales from the prior three years, not listings.”*



Empathy in Action

- **Listen for Understanding**
- **Gather Facts**
- **Consider Context & Impact**
- **Adjust for Special Circumstances**

Empathy is a Skill

“Empathy represents the foundation skill for all the social competencies important for work.”

-Daniel Goleman,
Harvard psychologist, author, & science journalist

Lead with Empathy

“People don’t care how much you *know* until they know how much you care.”

-President Theodore Roosevelt

Empathy within the Law

Empathy is not

Favoritism

Bias

Bending the rules

Tolerating abuse

Empathy Needs Boundaries

Pause

Set a boundary

Prioritize safety

Empathy in Assessing

Listening & Asking Questions

Patient, Clear Communication

Understanding Context & Considering Impact

Adjusting for Condition & Unique Circumstance

Empathy Prevents Errors



Better Fact-Finding



Richer Context



Clear Communication



Fair Adjustments

Empathy in Action

**“How can I correctly apply the law
to correct this error?”**

-Empathetic Assessment Professional

Why Empathy Matters



Why Empathy Matters

- **Property & tax issues are emotional**
- **Many callers are confused, overwhelmed, or grieving**
- **Empathy reduces conflict and builds trust**
- **People remember how they were treated**

Key Principle

**People need to feel heard before
they can process information**

**Communication
Builds Trust**

The Widow

A senior citizen calls stating their property taxes have doubled and their spouse recently passed.

Responses

Bad Response: *“Your taxes didn’t double. It’s because your exemptions changed.”*

Empathetic Response: *“I’m very sorry for your loss. I know dealing with paperwork during this time can be overwhelming. Let’s look at what may have changed on the tax bill together.”*



Empathy in Action

- Acknowledge their loss
- Slow down the conversation
- Offer to walk through the issue

Angry Caller

A caller is angry and says the office “messed up their taxes.”

Responses

Bad Response: *“You’ll need to calm down or I can’t help you.”*

Empathetic Response: *“I can hear that this situation is really frustrating. Let’s go through the notice together so we can figure out what happened.”*



Empathy in Action

- **Don't match the anger**
- **Validate frustration without agreeing with accusations**
- **Shift toward problem-solving**

Treated Unfairly

A caller believes their property assessment is unfair compared to neighbors.

Responses

Bad Response: *“That’s just how the assessment works.”*

Empathetic Response: *“I understand why that would feel frustrating. Let’s review how the assessment was determined and compare the factors that affect property values.”*



Empathy in Action

- **Acknowledge perception of fairness**
- **Provide transparency**
- **Educate without dismissing concerns**

Property Damage or Poor Condition

Fire

Flood

Storm damage

Hoarding conditions

Responses

Bad Response: *“You’ll just need to submit the form if you want anything adjusted.”*

Empathetic Response: *“I’m sorry to hear about the damage. That must be really stressful. There may be options that could help in situations like this. Let me explain what the process looks like.”*



Empathy in Action

- **Recognize the emotional impact**
- **Avoid sounding procedural**
- **Offer guidance and next steps**

Language Barrier

Caller has limited English and is struggling to explain their issue

Responses

Bad Response: *“I can’t understand you.”*

Empathetic Response: *“I want to make sure I understand you correctly. Do you prefer another language? We may be able to find translation assistance.”*



Empathy in Action

- **Patience**
- **Respect**
- **Accommodate using available resources**

Empathy in Practice

Empathy is not about changing policies.

It's about changing how we communicate.

Empathy Framework



**Acknowledge
the situation**



**Validate the
emotion**



**Offer help or
explanation**



**Guide toward
a solution**

Final Thought

**People may forget the explanation,
but they remember how they were treated.**

Reflection Exercise

Reflection

Think about one property or one interaction where context changed everything.

Practical Tools

Self Checklist



Listen



**Gather
context**



**Explain
process**



**Document
accurately**

Ask yourself, "Did I?"

Interview Questions

Scenario-Based Question:

“A resident is angry because their exemption application was denied and feels the system is unfair. How would you respond?”



Empathetic Responses include:

- “I’d let them explain without interrupting.”
 - “I’d acknowledge their frustration.”
 - “I’d explain the decision clearly and outline options.”
- 



Rate Your Experience Card

Encouraging Empathy
Through Feedback

We care ♥ *Please share!*

How would you rate your experiences?

     

What did we do well?

Is there anything we can improve?

Your name: _____

Your email: _____

Thank You for sharing your feedback!

How they Help?



**Give
citizens a
voice**



**Provide
real
feedback to
staff**



**Reinforce
positive
interactions**



**Identify
opportunities
for
improvement**



What We Learn

- How people felt during the interaction
- Whether they felt respected and heard
- How communication affects trust

Feedback helps turn empathy into daily practice



More tools are available in Whova

- **Empathy Language Guide**
- **Bilingual Exemption Brochure**
- **Empathy Self Checklist**
- **Empathy-Focused Interview Questions**
- **Feedback Card**
- **LinkedIn: A Simple Guide**

Closing

Make Empathy Standard



Lead



Hire



Train



Practice

Public Service

**“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is,
‘What are you doing for others?’”**

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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connected.

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Big **impact**.
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feedback** form.



Empathy Language Guide

Simple Phrases That Build Trust

Empathetic communication builds trust. Small shifts in language help people feel heard, respected, and supported, especially during stressful interactions.

Redirecting Without Dismissing

Instead of: That's not our department.

Use: Let me help connect you with the right department.

Correcting Without Blame

Instead of: You filled the form out wrong.

Use: Let's go through the form together to make sure everything is correct.

Explaining Rules Clearly

Instead of: That's just the rule.

Use: Here's how the rule works and why it applies here.

Saying No With Respect

Instead of: There's nothing we can do.

Use: Here's what we can do, and I'll walk you through the options.

Responding to Frustration

Instead of: You need to calm down.

Use: I can hear how frustrating this is.

When Someone Is Confused

Instead of: I already explained this.

Use: That's okay. Let me explain it another way.

Setting Expectations

Instead of: You'll have to wait.

Use: Here's what the timeline looks like and what to expect next.

Closing the Interaction

Instead of: That's all.

Use: Do you have any other questions I can help with today?

Leading with empathy builds trust in the process. While the outcome may remain the same, the experience can change for the better.

Empathy Self Checklist

Use this quick checklist during or after an interaction to reflect on communication, accuracy, and empathy.

Did I listen for understanding before responding?

Did I gather relevant context and facts?

Did I explain the process clearly and patiently?

Did I document the circumstance accurately?

Empathy strengthens trust in the process. Reflection helps make it a daily practice.

Interview Questions

Purpose

Hiring for empathy, especially in customer-facing government roles, is critical. In public service, empathy directly affects trust, fairness, and community satisfaction. This mini-assessment provides a structured, fair way to evaluate empathy, emotional intelligence, and service mindset during interviews.

5-Question Empathy Mini-Assessment

Scoring: 1–3 per question (1 = concerning, 2 = acceptable, 3 = strong)

1) Behavioral: Handling Frustration

Question: *“Tell me about a time you dealt with a frustrated or upset customer. What did you do?”*

- **3:** Identifies emotions, validates feelings, adapts approach, reflects on learning
- **2:** Resolves issue politely; limited emotional insight
- **1:** Blames customer, dismisses feelings, cites policy only

2) Behavioral: Compassion with Boundaries

Question: *“Describe a situation where you had to enforce a rule someone didn’t like.”*

- **3:** Explains rationale respectfully, maintains dignity, offers next steps
- **2:** Enforces rule correctly; minimal empathy or communication
- **1:** Defensive, rigid, or condescending

3) Behavioral: Self-Awareness

Question: *“Tell me about a time you misunderstood someone. How did you handle it?”*

- **3:** Owns mistake, regulates emotions, repairs relationship
- **2:** Acknowledges misunderstanding; limited reflection
- **1:** Deflects blame; no self-reflection

4) Behavioral: Service Mindset

Question: *“Describe a time you went beyond your job duties to help someone.”*

- **3:** Proactive support, thoughtful follow-through, community focus
- **2:** Helpful within role boundaries
- **1:** No example or minimizes helping

5) Values & Judgment

Question: “How do you balance enforcing rules with being compassionate?”

- **3:** Articulates dignity, fairness, transparency, stewardship of public trust
 - **2:** Mentions balance without depth
 - **1:** Frames compassion as optional or conflicting with rules
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Scenario-Based Assessment

Scenario: “A resident is angry because their exemption application was denied and feels the system is unfair. How would you respond?”

Look for:

- Listening first; calm tone
- Acknowledging frustration
- Clear, non-condescending explanation
- Options and next steps

Strong responses often include:

- “I’d let them explain without interrupting.”
 - “I’d acknowledge their frustration.”
 - “I’d explain the decision clearly and outline options.”
-

What to Listen For (Across All Answers)

Empathy Indicators: emotional awareness, perspective-taking, respect, curiosity, growth mindset

Red Flags: blaming language, “that’s just policy,” dismissing emotions, lack of accountability, portraying self as the only competent person

We Care Please Share!

How would you rate your experiences?



What did we do well?

Is there anything we can improve?

Your name: _____

Your email: _____

Thank You for sharing your feedback!

LinkedIn: A Simple Guide for Assessment Professionals

A quick overview for those new to LinkedIn

What LinkedIn Is (and Isn't)

LinkedIn is a professional networking platform. Think of it as a digital resume, a professional directory, and a way to stay connected to the assessment community. It is not Facebook, not a place to debate policy, and not something that requires frequent posting. You control how visible and active you are.

Important to Know Before You Start

You do not have to create an official office or public page to use LinkedIn. You can choose to create one, but it is optional. Many assessment professionals use a personal LinkedIn page that they use professionally to network with other assessment professionals, industry partners, and community leaders.

Keep in mind: LinkedIn is for professional purposes. What you share (or don't share) becomes part of your professional image. When in doubt, keep content factual, respectful, and work appropriate.

Why LinkedIn Is Useful in the Assessment World

Even a basic LinkedIn profile can help you stay connected to IPAI, IAAO, and other professional organizations; follow conference updates, legislation, and best practices; maintain connections with colleagues you meet at trainings and conferences; and demonstrate professionalism in public service. Many assessment professionals use LinkedIn simply to read and stay informed.

Setting Up a 'Good Enough' Profile

You only need three things to get started: a clear, professional head and shoulders photo; a headline with your job title and organization (for example, Assessor | Your Township); and your current role listed under experience. Your profile does not need to be perfect to be useful.

How Most Assessment Professionals Use LinkedIn

Posting is optional. Common uses include browsing posts from professional organizations, following conferences and associations, connecting with colleagues after meetings or trainings, and learning through short posts and shared resources. Many professionals rarely post, and that is completely acceptable.

Basic Connection Etiquette

Connect with people you have met professionally. A short note is helpful but not required, such as 'Nice meeting you at the conference.' You do not need to accept every request. Quality connections matter more than quantity.

Helpful Tips

You can mute or unfollow content you do not want to see, update your profile gradually, keep LinkedIn strictly professional, and be present without being active. Think of LinkedIn as a tool, not a commitment.

One Final Reassurance

There is no single right way to use LinkedIn. Some assessment professionals post regularly. Some never post at all. Both approaches are valid and both can be effective.

Property Tax Exemption Information / Información sobre Exenciones de Impuestos a la Propiedad

General Homestead Exemption / Exención General de Vivienda Principal

English: Homestead property (a home you own and live in as your main residence) can receive a reduction in the assessed value used to calculate your property taxes.

Español: Si usted es dueño de su casa y vive en ella como su residencia principal, puede recibir una reducción en el valor tasado que se usa para calcular sus impuestos sobre la propiedad.

Senior Citizens' Homestead Exemption (65+) / Exención de Vivienda para Personas Mayores (65+)

English: Homeowners age 65 or older may qualify for an additional reduction in their home's assessed value. This is added to the General Homestead Exemption.

Español: Los propietarios de vivienda de 65 años o más pueden calificar para una reducción adicional en el valor tasado de su vivienda. Esta exención se suma a la Exención General de Vivienda.

Low-Income Senior Citizens Assessment Freeze / Congelamiento de Avalúo para Personas Mayores de Bajos Ingresos

English: This program freezes the equalized assessed value (EAV) of a qualified senior's home to help prevent increases caused by inflation. Income limits apply.

Español: Este programa mantiene congelado el valor tasado de la vivienda de una persona mayor calificada para ayudar a evitar aumentos causados por la inflación. Se aplican límites de ingreso.

Disabled Persons' Homestead Exemption / Exención para Personas con Discapacidad

English: Homeowners with a qualifying disability may receive a reduction in their home's assessed value.

Español: Los propietarios de vivienda con una discapacidad que califique pueden recibir una reducción en el valor tasado de su vivienda.

Disabled Veterans' Homestead Exemption / Exención para Veteranos con Discapacidad

English: Veterans with a service-connected disability may receive significant reductions in the assessed value of their primary residence depending on the disability rating.

Español: Los veteranos con una discapacidad relacionada con su servicio pueden recibir reducciones importantes en el valor tasado de su residencia principal, dependiendo del nivel de discapacidad.

Returning Veterans' Homestead Exemption / Exención para Veteranos que Regresan del Servicio

English: Veterans returning from active duty in an armed conflict may qualify for a temporary reduction in their home's assessed value.

Español: Los veteranos que regresan del servicio activo en un conflicto armado pueden calificar para una reducción temporal en el valor tasado de su vivienda.

Contact / Contacto

Mary M. Tamez, Crete Township Assessor
1367 Wood St. Crete, IL 60417
Phone (708) 672-8291 (ext.2)
Mary@creteassessor.com

Will County Supervisor of Assessments Office
302 N Chicago St, 2nd Floor
Joliet, IL 60432
Phone: (815) 740-4648
www.willcountysoa.com