



CULTIVATING EMPATHIC INTELLIGENCE

a practical guide to building empathy



Ideos Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the research and application of Empathic Intelligence (MQ) in culture and society. Our pursuit of empathy works at the intersection of faith, dialogue, and civic engagement so that the dignity, experiences, and perspectives of all people are included in efforts to solve our greatest challenges.

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LET'S START WITH THE BIG PICTURE

Can you recall the climate on January 1st, 2021? Polarization in America was at an all-time high. Across the nation, positions on politics, race, religion, and more were dividing relationships between families, friends, and colleagues. Many of us were feeling the emotional and physical impact of a nation that couldn't seem to simply sit down and talk.

So we began a powerful experiment. On January 28th, 2021 thirteen of those Americans—representing the far right, far left, and everything in between—dared to cross the lines of difference with only one goal: to see if it was possible to cross ideological, political, cultural, and even spiritual divides and find common ground. And perhaps even friends.

What about you? What sorts of people or groups come to mind who seem to be the polar opposite of you in life, politics, spirituality, or ideology?

What started almost a year ago culminated in this powerful documentary film—Dialogue Lab: America—showcasing those conversations. You are now a part of this experiment, and we'd like to continue expanding the dialogue into every home and neighborhood in our country.

The key skill needed for real dialogue—the kind of talking that results in meaningful connection and shared learning—is empathy. Christy Vines, President, and CEO of Ideos Institute is a global leader in empathic intelligence (MQ). Her work and expertise lie at the intersection of faith, social/cultural polarization, and conflict transformation. Over the next few pages, we will give you clear and simple prompts that you can immediately apply to expand your own MQ and be a part of healing our country.

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A TOOL FOR BUILDING EMPATHY

We are all on a journey toward better empathic intelligence (MQ). Where mere “sympathy” might be described as “feeling sorry” for someone’s predicament, “empathy” is much deeper. It entails walking in someone else’s shoes, taking on their perspectives, their feelings, their burdens as if they were our own. While sympathy causes us to understand others’ opinions and hardships on our own terms, empathy compels us to want to do something about them.

A key step in this journey is to be able to answer the question, “What do they feel?”

But first I have a confession. We’ve actually been slowly walking you through a series of related questions that we use here at IDEOS to help people learn empathy. It’s actually a remarkable tool, and here it is:



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We start at the bottom and work up. Think about a person or group that you just can't seem to understand. Why do they act and think that way?! It can be hard to jump in and answer a question about their "feelings" when so much about who they are feels strange or even wrong.

But if we take it slow and start with the external—what do they see, hear, say, do—it then becomes possible to surmise the internal—what do they think and feel. This is best done (and indeed designed!) to be done in a group. I as an individual can attempt this exercise sure, but a group will allow us to see even more angles and perspectives.

Try that this week. Think of a group of people you disagree with and start at the bottom of this triangle and slowly work your way up. Spend extra time on the feeling question.

Does analyzing what you believe people see, hear, say, do, and think help you begin to "feel" what they might be feeling? At the risk of redundancy, "How does this exercise make you feel?!"

As you can see, there's one more step to this pyramid. Empathy should call us to action, and finding out what others need is vital. We'll look at that more next.

For now, spend some time reflecting on this pathway toward empathic intelligence and trying to grow in feeling what others feel this week.

A SLIGHT BUT CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE

Do you know the difference between “sympathy” and “empathy”? Though often confused with one another, sympathy and empathy are actually fundamentally different. While a sympathetic individual will conclude in the end “I feel bad for you,” an empathic individual will conclude “I feel bad, and I want to understand how I am both part of the problem and the solution.” While sympathy causes us to understand others' opinions and hardships on our own terms, empathy compels us to want to do something about them.

That definition says that the ultimate goal of empathy should be action. We created the film, Dialogue Lab: America, for that purpose. We want to see communities across our country transformed when people courageously choose empathy and respond to one another. (We don't simply want a lot of people who know concepts and talking points!)

The final question we want to ask on our journey toward empathy is, “What are they needing?”

It should be noted, this does not mean that we must fully agree with the other side's beliefs or assumptions, or truths. But if we are growing in empathy we will be able to see the other side's humanity more fully and want to act on their behalf in some way.

BRING PRACTICAL TRAINING TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

Did you know that Ideos Institute leads trainings for organizations to grow in empathy? **Christy Vines** is the President & CEO of Ideos and a California-based conflict expert. Her work and expertise lie at the intersection of faith, social/cultural polarization, and conflict transformation. She is a global leader in empathic intelligence.

For more than a decade Christy traveled the world looking for solutions to some of our world's greatest conflicts. She learned that empathy is that solution. We have developed training and curriculum to bring more individuals and companies into this journey toward empathic intelligence. We'd love to connect with you today!

[To find out more about Christy and Ideos Institute at click here](#)

THANK YOU!

The logo for Ideos Institute features a stylized icon on the left consisting of a square with diagonal lines and a vertical bar. To the right of the icon, the word "Ideos" is written in a large, bold, serif font.

[ideosinstitute.org](https://www.ideosinstitute.org)

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