

How to Give and Receive Empathy

Interview with Scott Catamas

Olivier: Hey Scott, how are you doing?

Scott: I'm doing well Olivier, I'm happy to be here talking with you.

Olivier: Yeah. I'm super excited to talk about emotional intelligence and especially about empathy. So you're Scott Catamas you're the founder of the Love Coach Academy, you're a relationship coach. Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Scott: Sure. So the last 20 years I've made my living coaching and teaching and my primary focus has been on compassionate communication and emotional intelligence skill building. And really at the heart of it all is empathy. When we are triggered we tend to be in the back part of our brain, where the reptile brain takes over, and we go from being a spiritual person to a raging reptile. Right? Is that familiar?

Olivier: Totally.

Scott: And what I like to work with people on is recognizing where you're vulnerable, what are the things in your life, your veils of past pain, your triggers, the ways you get re-stimulated that are going to send you into reptile brain, how to know what those are, how to notice it, and how to pull up and live in our frontal lobe. And our frontal lobe, also known as the forebrain, that's the empathy center of the brain and the observer part of the brain. That's where the Dalai Lama lives, that's where spiritually advanced people live. Where we have empathy for ourself, empathy for others, and the ability to see the big picture.

Scott: So that's really at the heart of my work and I love to work with couples, I work with families, I work with small businesses. It really is important in the professional workplace to be hanging out here in the frontal lobe in the way we think and the way we see the world. Versus hanging out in the back part of the brain. So that's really kind of my main thing.

Olivier: That's perfect because what I've found in relationships especially, like intimate relationships, my own and seeing others, and also in my research I was reading this book from the Gottmans saying that usually men want less fighting in the relationship and more sex. But on the other hand, the women really need to be heard and understood and they need to feel emotionally received, to feel the heart connection, to be able to then open to intimacy. But when the trigger happens, usually the man wants to fix the situation and the woman if it's reversed, the woman tends to want to kind of fix the feeling in the man or fix the person, fix the man and what they need to change to not be on the receiving end of that trigger.

Olivier: So it looks like being able to not go into those patterns -I don't know if it's the wiring or if it's a cultural learning- but how do we do different and how... It's the main thing: if we could just like give empathy instead of defensiveness, it would change everything. So how can we do that Scott?

Scott: You're absolutely right with everything you've shared, and what I always suggest for people is make a holy vow, make a commitment that the prime directive always is to understand each other. See if we are committed to really understanding each other, that takes us out of the fixing model, it takes us out of the make wrong model. Where it goes bad is when people go into right, I'm right, you're wrong, or I'm good, you're bad, or attack and defend, right? And all of those polarities, all of those things create polarity and separation. So the key is to absolutely be committed when things get tough, when we have a difference, we're not going to go into right/wrong, we're not going to go into attack and defend, we're not going to go into good/bad. We're going to seek to understand each other.

Scott: And it's a commitment that people really need to make. And by the way not just lovers, that's a commitment between people that live together, people that work together, always seeking to understand each other. And recognizing if we're too triggered, right, if we're too into our reptile brain, then we can't, we don't really want to understand the other. We just want to be right. Or we just want to get our way, right?

Scott: So learning how to recognize when am I in that place, that "no I don't want to understand you, I just want to get my way", and that's where I need to pull back and get centered and then come back when I'm genuinely interested in understanding you. And the thing about is if we take the time to always understand each other, then the solutions emerge. People think it's going to take longer because they just want to get their way, right? But if two people just want to get their way, they could fight forever. And there are couples and businesses that break up because of that. But if we commit to always understanding each other, almost always the solutions then come.

Olivier: Right, so first make a commitment, that's what I'm hearing from you. Second, take more time and distance and maybe talking in turns. Is that what you're suggesting?

Scott: Yeah, so just to clarify, step one: commit that seeking to understand each other with mutual respect is the prime directive. That's like the foundation of our relationship.

Olivier: Right.

Scott: Then the self reflection of when a difference comes up, how centered am I? Am I really wanting to make you wrong, judge you, criticize you, or get my way, or am I in that place of prime directive? I really want to understand you and I want for you to understand me. So that we are learning to see the world and work together whether it's as lovers, roommates, work mates, roommates, whatever it is, so that that is the foundation of our relationship. That's the way. And then how do we actually do that if we're both seeking to understand each other, is what you just pointed to. One step at a time, I share a big though, ask for your understanding, do you understand it? What did you

hear? Clarify, make sure you heard me correctly. Then you share one big thought, make sure I understand it correctly and we go back and forth that way. It takes a little longer in the short run, and saves relationships in the long run.

Olivier: Wow, yeah. So take time to share a thought, and ask for reflection, "what did you hear?" And maybe fine tune it. And then in shift to the other person.

Scott: Exactly. That's right.

Olivier: I would like to know if you define yourself as someone who is able to feel what somebody else is feeling? Because some people say you know, "I'm an empath and I can exactly feel what they feel". And this is a different approach. Because when people are empaths they approach things a little differently from people that don't see that for themselves and they need more of a method. So I was just wondering where you are coming from?

Scott: Well I guess one way of looking at it is are we in our head, or are we in our heart. Now the head is wonderful for anything logical. It's wonderful for reading a map, it's wonderful for doing math. It's wonderful for doing accounting, but being in our head is not especially useful when we're in relationships and there's a difference. Because we start projecting onto the other. Remember any thought we ever have about another person, even our spouse is always a projection. It may be accurate. Most of the time it's not. But if we're in our heart when it comes to relationships -so in our heart again we're seeking to understand each other, and ideally where empathy comes in is seeking to feel each other. Because here's the deal, if you and I are having an argument, Olivier, we could argue forever about an intellectual concept. Trump is great, Trump is horrible, you know, we could argue forever. But what's not arguable is what you're feeling.

Olivier: Right.

Scott: If you're feeling angry, that's not arguable, that's what you're feeling. If I'm feeling scared, that's not arguable, it's what I'm feeling. So our feelings, if we're in touch with our feelings, are never arguable, and they're also very human. So let's say we're arguing about Trump, or arguing about anything, the moment one of us gets vulnerable and goes, "I got to be honest I'm just really scared". Shift. We shift out of the intellectual back and forth bullshit and we drop into the shared humanity, because you know what it's like to feel scared. So we all know what it feels like to be scared. And when we're scared it's like, oh God this is like the hardest moments in life.

Olivier: Let me give you an example just to work with.

Scott: Sure.

Olivier: Personal example. So I was with my wife Lissa on a hike in Maui for that matter, and we left the car and she was like oh, I don't want to carry my bottle around and I'm like "oh, I have a green juice and we can have the green juice". And we're walking and we're talking and we're talking and we're talking, and I'm sipping the green juice and I'm

sipping the green juice, and at some point she turns to me and she's like "um, can I have some of the green juice?" I'm like "oh crap!" I just tossed it. And I felt really horrible about it. And I was like, as the man, you know I wanted right away to fix the situation. First I was like "don't blame me", I didn't say that, but you know like the instant thing without even thinking-

Scott: You wanted to defend yourself.

Olivier: Oh shit, I'm going to be blamed, so I want to fix this situation right away I'm like oh crap I'm sorry I just tossed it, but I can get you something else, there's like a vendor over there I can get you like coconut juice or something like that. And she got mad. Because she was like "oh, yeah it's like you didn't care about me", and she said something along the lines of "I feel that you don't care about me". So my reaction was trying to fix the situation, "I'm going to get you another drink if you're thirsty", and for her sake "it's not about being thirsty, it's about you let me down and I fee like you don't care about me".

Olivier: So how we would do better than just that?

Scott: So that's a great example. That's a great, so perfectly human story. So you know my motto is "how perfectly human", as you know actually, very much. And so I think ideally the first thing was to just start there. Oh God, how perfectly human. Because both of you did something that didn't work. You wanted to defend yourself and then fix it. And she made an interpretation that wasn't accurate. Her interpretation that you didn't care is what caused her pain. And then of course, because you do care, then you're going to probably defend yourself even more, because of course you do, "let me show, I'll run up and down the hill six miles backwards through the snow to get you a bottle of water to prove that I care".

Olivier: Totally.

Scott: Right? 'Cause you want to be her hero.

Olivier: Totally.

Scott: So that's where again we have to slow it down, right? Slow it down. Wow. And ideally for each of you if possible to acknowledge "what am I feeling? What am I really feeling? And what's going on for the other?" Again, understanding each other. If she goes spinning off on this proves that he doesn't care for me, and now it triggers all the previous boyfriends that she left because they didn't care for her, the way she wanted, right? So now, it's about one tenth about the water, or the green juice and 90% about her fear that you don't care for her.

Olivier: Of course.

Scott: And for you, you're like desperately trying to fix the situation, because you do care. There's the irony.

Olivier: I care so much, it's crazy. Yeah.

Scott: Right, right. I so get this. I really get this. And that's underneath it what we want to do is have her really understand and feel the depth of your care.

Olivier: Right.

Scott: And that's going to only happen if you slow down. Because again if she's totally in her head with "he doesn't care, this is proof, fear", all that is taking over her. And you're going into your head either defending yourself or trying to prove that you care, you're both in your head, you're both going fast, you're both not listening to each other. But if you slow down, go back to the prime directive: understanding each other. And she goes into "God, I get really scared because I so need to be cared for and it triggers my fear and my pain that my guy doesn't really care for me". And if she can slow down and realize that that's what's really going on for her, it's her fears coming out, then if you can go "honey, I'm embarrassed".

Olivier: Yeah.

Scott: She can relate to embarrassment. I'm embarrassed. I screwed up.

Olivier: I totally felt embarrassed.

Scott: "Yeah I feel so embarrassed", that is vulnerable. You talk about your feelings and say "honey I care about you so much", you know, and if you slow down and you say it with that feeling how you really do, then that gets through to her. So again it's kind of heart to heart slowed down connection as opposed to two raging reptiles, right, going at it right?

Scott: This is always about slowing down, connecting. One other things that I'd say in that thing, sometimes if we both got too in our heads, go right into just holding each other. Let's not talk for a couple of minutes. Can I just hold you and let's get centered?

Scott: Because Olivier, we're mammals and we need homeostasis and our bodies, remember love, faster than our minds and our ego. If you're holding her, her body begins to relax into yours, begins to remember "this is my lover, this is my man, this is my mate". The body begins to remember that. Now the mind might still be spinning, "I can't believe he drank all the green juice", right. So the mind is still doing that shit. But the body's going "oh this feels so good, oh yeah, this is my guy". Right?

Olivier: Yeah. To calm the whole nervous system.

Scott: To calm the nervous system. So I really emphasize a lot if possible, hold each other and don't talk.

Olivier: Yeah.

Scott: Hold each other. Relax into each other's arms again.

Olivier: Yeah. Yeah. And then share like vulnerably, "I felt embarrassed. I totally fucked up, and don't know how to make up for it".

Scott: That's a great story. Thank you. It's a really good example to work with. Really good.

Olivier: Yeah. Well that's awesome Scott. Thank you so much and I think we're going to leave with that for now.

Olivier: So if people want to experience more of you, where could they go?

Scott: Go to my website, <http://lovecoachscott.com>. And I've got online courses, I've got free classes, I've got all sorts of good stuff that I offer. Most of it's online now, and so lovecoachscott.com.

Olivier: Right and you also do private sessions?

Scott: I do do private sessions. I also train other coaches. I've got a really wonderful mentorship program where I train other coaches in emotional intelligence skill building.

Olivier: Perfect. Perfect. Thank you so much, Scott.

Scott: It was fun. Take care Olivier. And remember to always make sure you save some water or some green juice for her!

Olivier: Haha, totally.

Scott: All right, take care.

Olivier: Thank you.