

A Matter of Empathy

In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey describes an experience on a subway in New York.

A man and his children boarded the train, and the children were so loud and rambunctious they disrupted the entire car. The man sat down beside Covey, oblivious to the situation.

Covey finally said, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more."



The man looked startled, then said, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital, where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Covey's attitude instantly changed, and he later admitted that he learned a valuable lesson: seek to understand before seeking to be understood.

In Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, we are involved in a highly emotional business – caring for frail and infirm people, people with problems, people who are the loved ones of their families.

Sometimes we encounter people who may irritate or hurt us because they themselves are in pain. If they lash out at us, perhaps it's just the burst dam of personal frustration.

Let's look beyond their words and see their hearts. Let's seek to understand before seeking to be understood.

I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days (Ezekiel 3:15).

– Beecher Hunter