"Empathy is the critical 21st-century skill." (Continued). In recent weeks, we have discussed the growing consensus among researchers that the most important skill for job security in this age of automation may be empathy. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and automation threaten to displace an ever-expanding share of the labor force-supplanting both blue and white collar jobs. Those looking to secure future opportunities for themselves and their children must identify and develop skills and abilities differentiated from the masses of other workers and artificially-intelligent automation. Effective empathy is beyond the reach of automatons and becoming more scarce-making it more valuable, powerful, and essential to success.

In Humans Are Underrated : What High Achievers Know That Brilliant Machines Never will, Geoff Colvin defines empathy as discerning what some other person is thinking and feeling, and responding in some appropriate way :

> We shouldn't focus on beating computers at what they do. We'll lose that contest... What will people do better than computers?

> ... as machines rapidly take over the largely mechanical, nonsocial elements ofwork, our most valuable roles become more intensely social. Empathy is the first element of how all that happens, the basis of every significant relationship...

In the May, 2013 issue of Forbes, Professor Jayson M. Boyers of Champlain College discussed why empathy is the force that moves business forward.

> Successful business leaders are receptive to disruption and innately aware of what is going on in their organizations both internally and externally. Empathy must be the driving force behind business communication... The catalyst for change is open, two-way communication...

> [Empathy] in the workplace creates and encourages sharing ideas free from the fear of ridicule. If we are to keep our businesses relevant and our consumers happy, we must embrace empathy and let it be the force that drives us forward.

Studies by the Ketchum Leadership Communication Monitor (KLCM) found:

Effective Leadership = Open Communication + Decisive Action + Personal Presence

Crisis situations demand "practical, accountable solutions that match words and deeds, while operationalizing empathy rather than simply showing empathy for its own sake." Effective empathy involves more than feelings - requires action.

KLCM's most recent study found that the rapid pace of change demands **"Leadership at the Speed of Now",** yet of more than 6,000 respondents in 12 nations, *only 31% of business leaders and a paltry 22% of political leaders are viewed as demonstrating effective leadership.*

KLCM believes that the era of hierarchical leadership is fading, with only 25% of respondents looking to the CEO for leadership - while 41% believe that leadership should come broadly from the organization and everyone in it. As organizations become more collaborative and less responsive to top-down demands, empathy is becoming increasingly crucial for effective performance.

KLCM identified the following five attributes as the most important characteristics of effective Leadership - all of which are advanced by empathy:

1.   Leading by example (63%)
2.   Communicating in an open and transparent way (61%)
3.   Admitting mistakes (59%)
4.   Bringing out the best in others (58%)
5.   Handling controversial issues or crises calmly and confidently (58%)

A working paper titled *The One-Trillion Dollar Global Talent Gap: What it is. and What we can do about it* by Ernest J. Wilson III, dean at the University of Southern California, identified a new way of strategic thinking with five distinct talent attributes for collaboration, innovation and enhanced performance. Wilson notes that these ''Third Space" talents "are quite distinct from the talents and orientations of engineering and traditional business executives." They are:

1.   Adaptability (flexibility when dealing with change)
2.   Cultural Competence (capacity to think, act, and move across multiple borders)
3.   360 Degree Thinking (holistic thinking)
4.   Intellectual Curiosity (constantly learning and growing), and
5.   Empathy

In a recent missive published in the *Harvard Business Review*, Wilson admitted his surprise that empathy kept coming up in their research, while noting its importance to persuasion and managing change:

All of the people we interviewed were serious business executives. Empathy was not the first virtue I associated with the rough and tumble of today's highly competitive business world. I expected to hear about boldness, perseverance, and toughness.

Later, when we reported the results of our research to other leaders, many said empathy was the most important of the five attributes we had uncovered...

Why empathy over other values? We have teased out several possible explanations.

First the monolithic group formerly known as the audience-the passive customer, the compliant patient, and the couch potato-are all relics of the pre-digital past when communication was mostly a one-way street from seller to buyer. Now communication goes both ways. Today's multiple and highly vocal audiences demand to be heard or they will take their business elsewhere. You need empathy to know who those audiences are and what they want...

Neither technical knowledge nor business acumen suffices. You must be sincerely interested in understanding other cultural preferences and choices.

Empathy counts inside company walls, too. Many companies have abandoned rigid hierarchies and top-down command, believing that collaboration produces better results than cutthroat competition... In these companies, relationships and persuasion have become essential for success. And to persuade effectively you must be able to empathize...

Empathy isn't everything... [but it] remains an emotional foundation-it's the 'attribute-prime" of successful leaders.

Wilson identified Empathy/Effective Listening & Collaboration Skills as the most critical, most lacking competency among senior executives and mid-level managers.

Improving empathy creates differential advantage for prime positions in the workplace with a skill that cannot be duplicated through artificial intelligence or automation. Programs already exist that feign empathy, but we know instinctively that they merely reflect the agenda of unknown programmers or impersonal corporations seeking to manipulate our emotions or control our response. *No matter how precise their programming, the influence of automated empathy is limited because at our core, we know that computers don't care.*

Empathy builds unique bonds of human trust and motivation that cannot be duplicated by algorithms. The more our lives become directed by digital devices and controlled by computers, the more we will long for genuine human connections-and the more powerful empathy will become. *Computerized equipment may ultimately replace most of the tasks we now associate with employment, but effective leadership will increasingly require empathy.*

In a LinkedIn post on Monday, former General Electric Chairman, CEO, and leadership maven Jack Welch revealed that during more than 1,000 events over the last 15 years, at all but a few, someone complained about their boss: "Despite having offered just about every possible answer for relief, more often than not, I haven't satisfied the unhappy employee." After a decade and a half of struggling with ineffective answers, Welch reports finally landing on a useful response:

> Would you want to work for... You*? If not, why not, and what are you going to do about it?*

The thousands of people who have complained to Welch were seeking empathy- and answering these questions forces grappling with empathy. No matter how well-justified the complaint, these questions encourage us to imagine ourselves in our boss' position and to consider our impact on others. It is an empathetic way to encourage putting empathy into action-and a fine foundation upon which to enhance leadership effectiveness in this era of declining efficacy of hierarchical authority.

While we are born with instinctive responsiveness to others, empathy is a skill that can be developed. Roman Krznaric, author of <u>*Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*</u> identifies Six Habits of Highly Empathetic People (HEP):

> ...Empathy doesn't stop developing in childhood... we can make empathy an attitude and a part of our daily lives, and thus improve the lives of everyone around us. Here are the Six Habits of Highly Empathic People!

> Habit 1: Cultivate Curiosity about strangers...
> - Set yourself the challenge of having a conversation with one stranger every week. All it requires is courage.

> Habit 2: Challenge prejudices and discover commonalities...
> - HEPs challenge their own preconceptions and prejudices by searching for what they share with people rather than what divides them.

Habit 3: Try another person's life...
- HEPs expand their empathy by gaining direct experience of other people's lives, putting into practice the Native American proverb, "Walk a mile in another man's moccasins before you criticize him."

Habit 4: Listen hard-and open up...
- HEPs listen hard to others and do all they can to grasp their emotional state and needs... But listening is never enough. The second trait is to make ourselves vulnerable... Empathy is a two-way street that, at its best, is built upon mutual understanding-an exchange of our most important beliefs and experiences.

Habit 5: Inspire mass action and social change...
- HEPs understand that empathy can also be a mass phenomenon that brings about fundamental social change... Empathy will most likely flower on a collective scale if its seeds are planted in our children.

Habit 6: Develop an ambitious imagination...
- Bill Drayton, the renowned father of social entrepreneurship," believes that in an era of rapid technological change, mastering empathy is the key business survival skill because it underpins successful teamwork and leadership.

Martin Hoffman, emeritus professor of psychology at New York University, notes: "You can enhance empathy by the way you treat children, or you can kill it by providing a harsh punitive environment." Parents can use the following strategies to help develop empathy in children:

- Nurture self-respect, "compassion for others, and a sense of responsibility for the world." Empathize with your children and encourage them to recognize and anticipate the feelings of others.

- Read aloud to children, taking time to discuss what is taking place and how the action impacts the characters.

- Encourage children to play more on their own-using their imagination when they are alone, and thinking about similarities to their playmates when they are with others.

- Validate how children feel (even when they act up). Understanding one's own feelings is the first step in appreciating others'.

- Avoid the temptation to use digital devices as babysitters, and limit the amount of time spent with them. Use care with social media-it is a poor substitute for real interaction-and discuss callous responses directed at (or by) your children.

- Take time to listen to your children, encourage, and explain. Work to articulate reasons other than: "Because I said so." Improve patience.

- Eat dinner together as a family more often, and use the time to discuss what is going on in the children's world-and the world at large.

- Encourage your children to make friends, join organizations, and connect with others (and do so yourself).

- Join your children in community service. Let them see you valuing others.