Communicating Empathy

THE HEART-HEAD-HEART™ METHOD

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Program Planning Guide

PLANETREE
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Language of Caring
A BRANCH OF PLANETREE INTERNATIONAL
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Dear Program Leader:

As you know, people judge us by the quality of their TOTAL experience with us. Empathy and caring are powerful contributors to an exceptional experience.

Yet, in today's hectic, high-pressure healthcare environment, healthcare staff and providers have become so busy and task-oriented that their caring may not come across to the people they serve.

The *Communicating Empathy* program helps team members embrace and use the powerful Heart-Head-Heart™ communication method to make their caring felt in their everyday interactions. Patients, families and coworkers will FEEL their caring and become more trusting, confident, cooperative, and less anxious. In short, they will feel safe and supported in our caring hands.

Use this "Planning Guide" to learn about program components and implementation options, so you and others involved in planning can create your plan.

Thank you for leading your team to enhance the human experience and improve performance through communication that makes caring visible in every interaction.

With appreciation,
The Language of Caring and Planetree International Team

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1. Purpose

Communicating Empathy: The Heart-Head-Heart™ Method helps people, including those in healthcare, express their empathy and caring effectively and consistently. This do-it-yourself program enables leaders at every level to engage providers and staff in mastering and consistently using the proven Heart-Head-Heart communication method to enhance their interactions. It is grounded in best practices developed by Language of Caring® and instituted in healthcare organizations nationwide.

Expected results include:

- Increased employee engagement as staff connect more often with patients, families, and coworkers
- Greater patient engagement and improved outcomes
- More productive team interactions through greater collaboration, cooperation, and less conflict
- People expressing empathy, compassion and support to reduce anxiety and promote healing

A growing research base demonstrates the power of empathy in positively transforming the patient, family and coworker experience in healthcare. Research shows that by communicating with empathy in every interaction, each member of the healthcare team produces benefits for patients and families, colleagues, the organization, and themselves. The Heart-Head-Heart method is a simple, yet powerful, mental model that helps people communicate with empathy and caring which leads to remarkable results.

The Results of Communicating with Empathy in Healthcare Interactions

- Reduced anxiety, as well as greater trust, engagement, and cooperation among patients and families
- Fewer difficult situations, complaints and lawsuits
- Stronger patient commitment and adherence to their care plans
- More positive patient outcomes
- Greater appreciation from patients and families
- Greater patient retention and loyalty
- A more positive grapevine about your organization
- Providers and staff who feel more engaged and gratified in their caring work
- Improved relationships outside of work, with friends, family, teachers, business contacts, and more

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2. Background and Facts

These days, people in healthcare feel extremely pressured. They have many priorities, responsibilities, and a combination of stresses they experience at work and beyond. As a result, there is a tendency for them to predominantly use "Head" or task-oriented communication. This looks and sounds like communication based mostly in explaining what they're doing, gathering information and describing actions/options/plans. What is missing are expressions of caring or "Heart" communication including verbal and non-verbal behaviors associated with empathy, appreciation, sincere regret about pain, anxiety and inconvenience, and observable actions that are tied to the emotional and connected personal experience.

Of course, people rely on us for "Head" communication. They need and want information, options, answers, explanations and choices. However, interactions that include solely Head messages feel impersonal. Patients and families often think, "These people may be competent, but do they really care about ME as an individual?"

> - **Heart Communication:** We tune into and acknowledge feelings and anxieties, respond from our hearts, and connect to the person as an individual.
> - **Head Communication:** We explain tasks, information, options, plans, and the business at hand.

Communicating "Heart" eases people's anxieties. It personalizes care and service while building the trust and comfort key to engaging patients and families. When staff members communicate exclusively from their heads, does that mean they don't CARE? Absolutely not. It's just that their caring does not come across in the way they intended. The result: The people they serve do not FEEL their caring and emotional support as part of their experience. The Heart-Head-Heart method is based on the premise that complete, effective and satisfying communication has both Heart and Head communication.

The Heart-Head-Heart Method

The Heart-Head-Heart Method is a mental model that prompts people to start their communication with a Heart message, move to a Head message (the business at hand), and end with another Heart message. Here's how it works:

- ♥ **Heart**: Speak from your heart first. Show personal caring and empathy. (eg: *That sounds so upsetting for you! I'm worry that happened!*)
- ♥ **Head**: Then speak from your head. Meet people's needs for action, information, solutions. (eg: *Let me explain… The options are… Here's what I'll do…*)
- ♥ **Heart**: Then, speak from the heart again. Close on a personal or feeling note. (eg: *I'm so glad you told me about this. I want to make things right for you.*)

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The Heart-Head-Heart *Sandwich* metaphor is a simple, visual way to remember to mix Heart and Head messages in a 2:1 ratio. The Language of Caring team has found that the Sandwich metaphor helps people remember and apply Heart-Head-Heart in their everyday situations.

The fact is…

People don't care how much we know unless they know how much we care.

Who is this program for?

For everyone! Nurses, physicians and providers, technicians, support services, leaders, all staff across the continuum of care, etc.

And for every type of healthcare organization. Healthcare systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, hospices, medical groups, health plans, outpatient centers, emergency departments, express care centers, pharmacies, home healthcare services and more!

It is also an effective intervention for departments or teams within organizations.

How does the *Communicating Empathy* program fit with other change initiatives?

By helping everyone communicate with caring, even under pressure and stress, Heart-Head-Heart can help you humanize and make more effective your implementation of performance improvement efforts including LEAN, your Electronic Health Record transition, mergers and acquisitions, safety initiatives, and much more. Communicating empathy is the "how" that ensures helpful and encouraging communication takes place, which is key to strengthening every other initiative's results.

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3. Program Components

The *Communicating Empathy* program consists of three different parts:

1. Planning and Preparing Leaders

2. *Communicating Empathy* Workshop followed by Mastery and Habit-Building

3. Sustainment and Further Improvement

Program Planning and Preparing Leaders

Program Planning comes first. This guide will walk you through the decisions you'll need to make to implement the *Communicating Empathy* program and get the results you want. Next, in alignment to your decisions, you will prepare facilitators to facilitate the workshop and leaders to lead their teams in mastery and habit-building.

Communicating Empathy Workshop

The *Communicating Empathy* Workshop is the training component of this program. This 60-minute workshop is critical to ensure every staff member understands and can apply the Heart-Head-Heart method. Then, following the next steps in the Team Leader's Action Plan, leaders use tools and resources to achieve concrete performance improvement, skill mastery, and results. The recommended time frame for the workshop and Habit-building is 8–16 weeks depending on your preferred timeline.

Sustainment and Further Improvement

After mastery, the challenge is ongoing sustainment. The goal is to reinforce and strengthen use of Heart-Head-Heart so empathic communication becomes a reliable, consistent and impressive feature in communication interactions over many years. It is essential to onboard new team members via your organization's new employee orientation or department-specific orientation, so Heart-Head-Heart continues to stay present in your organization. Other sustainment tactics include reminders, refreshers, adjustments to job descriptions, performance reviews, and more.

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B. Implementation Planning

1. Critical Questions for Planning and Decisions

Begin planning implementation by considering the following critical questions:

- Who will be the main person managing the program and its implementation?
- Do we need a planning team? If so, what will be its composition?
- Do we need an implementation team? If so, what will be its composition?
- What are the main factors driving our interest in implementing *Communicating Empathy*?
- Who are our target groups?
- Who will facilitate the *Communicating Empathy* workshop for the most effective results?
- What do we need to do to identify and prepare facilitators?
- What will we expect of senior leaders, other leaders, managers, and supervisors?
- How will we introduce the program to our organization?
- What on-going communication is needed to carry on the message of commitment and maintain momentum?
- How will we ensure follow-up for skill mastery, use, and reinforcement? For Example:
  - We will follow the provided Team Leader's Guide.
  - We will create our own mastery and reinforcement plan.

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2. Implementation Options

How you implement *Communicating Empathy: The Heart-Head-Heart Method* depends on your purpose and the size and availability of your target audience.

- **Option 1:** Make universal use of *Communicating Empathy* an organization-wide breakthrough objective.
- **Option 2:** Offer *Communicating Empathy* as a powerhouse communication skill module in an ongoing training program offered by your trainers or educators.
- **Option 3:** Use *Communicating Empathy* as an intervention to improve the patient experience in targeted groups or services.
- **Option 4:** Implement the *Communicating Empathy* program to jumpstart and/or strengthen a new initiative or culture change process.
- **Option 5:** Pilot *Communicating Empathy* with a sub-population to gain experience and produce successes, stories and evidence. Afterwards, make the case to continue spreading it organization-wide!

Option 1.
Make universal use of the *Communicating Empathy* program an organization-wide breakthrough objective.

A breakthrough objective is one that:

- Everyone in the organization can pursue with benefits for patients, families and coworkers.
- Provides a single focus. This makes implementation easier and more straightforward. It also avoids overwhelming people who are already besieged with multiple priorities.
- Can lead to significant improvement even if each individual in the organization makes only a small incremental improvement. Together, everyone's small improvements can have a breakthrough effect.

In this scenario, everyone learns the Heart-Head-Heart method and works towards applying it to everyday routines in their particular job. All managers are expected to lead their staff in integrating this into their routines, designing more "Heart" language, and helping staff practice. Everyone proceeds through the process together, making the impact visible and powerful.

Option 2.
Integrate the *Communicating Empathy* program as a powerhouse communication skill module in an ongoing training program offered by your trainers or educators.

In this scenario you have an ongoing training program on communication, patient and family-centered care, or service excellence. This can be an excellent component. Include this program in your series. This will build on and strengthen the training you already have in place.

Option 3.
Use the *Communicating Empathy* program as an intervention to improve the patient experience in targeted groups or services.

Target specific groups within your organization that particularly want or need to improve. This program can help raise patient ratings, strengthen staff engagement, and improve retention. Identify groups that stand out as needing improved communication. Think of areas where you could go from good to GREAT. Help targeted services distinguish their patients' experience in the marketplace.

Do some teams have a reputation for sub-standard service or communication? Are there teams with particularly high stress or strife among members? Communicating with empathy has proven to be a successful performance improvement intervention in:

- Patient care teams with below-target survey scores
- Emergency Departments with high stress and high importance as the front door to care
- Medical practices that are losing patients
- Managers and work teams with disturbing turnover
- An executive team seeking to have more productive interactions and communication
- Work teams with high levels of patient contact (e.g. Front Desk, Physical Therapy, Housekeeping, Food Service, Maintenance, Radiology, etc.)

Option 4.
Implement the *Communicating Empathy* program to jumpstart and/or strengthen a new initiative or culture change process.

Perhaps you are launching or are in the midst of implementing a big change such as the installation of an EHR, a safety initiative, or service redesign. Since such initiatives create significant stress, they are often fraught with strains and tensions within and between the teams involved. You can implement the *Communicating Empathy* program with the people involved to help them focus on communicating with caring during what is inevitably a very stressful process.

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Option 5.
Pilot the *Communicating Empathy* program with a sub-population.

This will enable you to gain experience and produce successes, stories and evidence; then you can make the case to spread the program. You might pilot with:

- One or two high-profile groups selected based on need

- Representatives from different services

- Motivated managers and teams who express their interest

- Three teams (one high-performing, one middle-performing, and one low-performing) so you can compare program effectiveness with teams at different performance levels

3. Evaluating Your *Communicating Empathy* Implementation

The *Communicating Empathy* Workshop

An Assessment Quiz and Answer Key is included in the Workshop. You can require every participant to take this 5-question multiple-choice quiz after the Heart-Head-Heart workshop. You can administer and score the Assessment Quiz using your Learning Management System or a manual process.

Establishing Metrics

Process Metrics: It's important to identify metrics for measuring the results of the *Communicating Empathy* program. It is equally important to establish metrics related to the implementation process. Too often, people conclude that a program has failed to produce results, when, in fact, the program was never fully implemented. Establish implementation goals and process metrics that help you monitor adherence to the process, such as:

- Percent participating in the *Communicating Empathy* Workshop
- A metric for tracking team leaders' adherence to the Team Leader's Action Plan. For example:
    - Use of Habit-Builders
    - Use of Feedback Tools
    - Coaching conversations conducted
    - Appreciation messages delivered

Measuring Results

If your team or organization receives patient ratings (CAHPS, CG-CAHPS, Child CAHPS, etc.), select specific survey items in the Nurse Communication Domain and Physician Communication Domain and track performance on those items and on the Communication Composite Score. Heart-Head-Heart has been shown to improve scores, especially on items that are strongly impacted by better communication and caring communication.

If you have a Point-of-Service method, such as Net Promoter Score, for gathering feedback from patients, you can make sure there is a question relevant to communicating with empathy, caring, responsiveness, and/or emotional support.

You can also select and use relevant items from your Employee Engagement or Satisfaction Survey.

The *Communicating Empathy* "Toolbox" includes tools you can use for program evaluation, including Self-Checks, Feedback from an Observer or Coach, and the Workshop Feedback Form. Additionally, the Toolbox includes a program review tool called "Taking Stock of Implementation Process and Results". This document, is used to gather perspectives on your strategy, its process and results. Use this midway through implementation and again at the end, so you can identify ways to improve your process and strengthen your results.

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4. Planning for Accountability

The most successful organizations plan their accountability strategy *upfront*. Leaders are responsible for holding themselves and the people that report to them accountable for their job performance, and this includes ensuring that individuals put into practice the training they receive. The *Communicating Empathy* program includes the "Team Leader's Action Plan", which is a succinct and easy-to-use document to help each leader step into their leadership role.

Expectations of Team Leaders

The Team Leader's Action Plan outlines and sequences the recommended actions each leader should take to effectively and thoroughly engage their team and support each individual to achieve skill mastery, consistent use and sustainment. Leaders are referred to tools and resources to make each action easier. Examine the Team Leader's Action Plan and decide whether you want to provide this (or a modification) to team leaders as their performance expectations for the program.

Questions to consider:

- What do you expect of team leaders? Do you want them to follow the Action Plan step-by step? Will there be a specific schedule? If not, what latitude will they have?

- How will you communicate expectations to leaders? Will everyone be in a meeting together, or will conversation take place one-on-one? What written communication is needed to back up these conversations?

- How will you track leader adherence to the expectations you establish? Will leaders use the Action Plan and check off what they have completed? Will there be an expectation to report out on completion along the way? Do you expect supervisors to habitually check-in with each leader during one-on-one meetings?
  Advice: Look to prior successful initiatives and employ the same accountability processes for *Communicating Empathy: The Heart-Head-Heart Method.*

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Example: Expectations of Team Leaders/Managers

You are responsible for fully implementing the *Communicating Empathy* program by:

- Enabling all staff to attend the *Communicating Empathy* Workshop introduction to the Heart-Head-Heart method.
- Role modeling the Heart-Head-Heart method and implementing the multi-week Team Leader's Action plan to provide staff with skill practice, feedback, coaching, reinforcement, and accountability.

Expectations of Staff Members

It is important that leaders clearly communicate their expectations to staff, and then follow-up with feedback and coaching. Using the Heart-Head-Heart framework while expressing expectations role models the expected behaviors and ensures that staff members feel cared about by their leader.

Example: Expectations of Staff Members

Heart

Thank you so much for your dedication to patients, family members and each other. I appreciate that you want to do the best for the people you interact with and that you have intentions of caring.

Head

However, it is not enough to have the intent to be a caring person or feel caring toward another person. We are all expected to COMMUNICATE our caring, so the people on the receiving end feel it and benefit from it. With the help of the Heart-Head-Heart method, I expect you to communicate your caring in your everyday interactions with patients, families, and your coworkers.

Heart

I am here to support you and want to THANK YOU for your commitment to this very important work.

The *Communicating Empathy* Workshop "Facilitator's Guide" includes instructions on how to share the identified expectations with all staff in the context of the workshop.

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Consult with your Human Resources team

Ask them to help you back up performance expectations for regular use of Heart-Head-Heart and other expressions of empathic communication in Human Resource practices such as New Employee Orientation, job descriptions, performance reviews, and recognition methods used by the organization.

Competency Documentation and Continuing Education Units

You can use the completed quiz as competency documentation for The Joint Commission, credentialing, and continuing education units. If you are on your Magnet journey, the *Communicating Empathy* program can be used to support the Structural Empowerment and Exemplary Professional Practice domains.

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5. Planning for the *Communicating Empathy* Workshop

Group size

The workshop is designed to work with groups of any size. You can set up multiple sessions in a central location. You can conduct this during staff meetings or offer it as an in-service session.

Select Facilitators

Consider these options for facilitators decide, given the scope of your program and target group.

- Training specialists/Educators: If you build the *Communicating Empathy* program into your ongoing training programs, your trainers can conduct the workshop.
- Champions/Opinion leaders: Many organizations identify a group of diverse staff or opinion leaders to serve as facilitators.
- Leaders/Managers: Other organizations have all managers conduct the session with their own teams. The benefits? Managers own the process. They sharpen their own communication skills. They are in the best position to help their team apply Heart-Head-Heart to their real work, set performance expectations, coach their staff, and hold them accountable.

Decide on giveaways

Every participant receives a copy of *The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook*. You can also give attendees a Heart-Head-Heart lapel pin. These pins are available for purchase at any time through Language of Caring (contact customerservice@languageofcaring.com).

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Tracking Successful Completion

Successful completion is defined by:

1. Attending the workshop, *and*

2. Scoring 80% or above on the Quiz

You can track participation of both using your Learning Management System or manually. Some questions to guide you to successfully track attendance include:

- How will you ensure widespread attendance?
- How will you track attendance?
- What is your make-up plan for people who missed it?
- How will you onboard new team members?

Preparing Facilitators

Provide the *Communicating Empathy* "Workshop Facilitator's Guide" to each facilitator. Encourage the use of the Plan-at-a-Glance, as well as prior planning for Habit-Building and Mastery activities. Leaders should be prepared to share their plan during the workshop as this helps create a better understanding of the process the team will go through.

Also, provide access to the Video: "How to Facilitate the Communicating Empathy Workshop". In this video, an experienced *Communicating Empathy* facilitator trainer walks through the workshop and provides facilitation tips. If you have more than one facilitator, they can watch the video together. If people are at different locations, show the video in a web meeting (such as Zoom, WebEx or GoToMeeting).

The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook for Participants

Included in this illustrated Handbook is information on empathy, fun and easy to apply tips, engaging stories of use, and inspiration for adopting Heart-Head-Heart. This booklet is meant to help each person apply Heart-Head-Heart successfully, have access to a quick resource for sharing it with friends and family, learn ways to show appreciation to coworkers, and much more.

The Handbook ends with participant worksheets needed for the Heart-Head-Heart Workshop.

- Facilitators should review and familiarize themselves with the handbook prior to the session.
- Every staff member participating in Heart-Head-Heart should receive their own copy of *The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook* as you are not permitted to duplicate them. Therefore, remember to order a copy for every participant. Be sure and clarify where facilitators can pick up the Handbooks for people attending each session, and where to return any unused copies.

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Mastery and Habit-Building

The *Communicating Empathy* Workshop by itself does not produce long-term performance improvement. To help people master Heart-Head-Heart, apply it to their specific jobs, and use it consistently requires leaders to provide direction, inspiration and role-modeling. Leaders must engage their teams in a series of short activities that provide practice, mastery and habit-building. Based on years of experience partnering with healthcare organizations to achieve sustainable performance improvement, the Language of Caring team has identified the critical actions team leaders need to take in order to get sustained improvement.

The Team Leader's Action Plan and Team Leader Responsibilities

The *Communicating Empathy* Team Leader's Action Plan briefs leaders (managers, supervisors, team leaders, officer manager, etc.) on the *Communicating Empathy* program and lays out the recommended team-level plan. Additionally, this resource includes an accountability planning outline that sequences the recommended actions each leader should take to effectively and thoroughly engage their teams and support each individual to achieve skill mastery, consistent use and sustainment. Leaders are referred to tools and resources to make each action easier.

Overview: Key Components of the Team Leader's Action Plan

		Resource
Role-Modeling Heart-Head-Heart by Leader	• Reminders to team leader about personally using Heart-Head-Heart in interactions with staff, patients, families • Sharing personal stories about Heart-Head-Heart	Suggestions on Team Leader Action Plan
Habit-Builder Activities	• Twenty activities, each lasting 5-10 minutes, which engage the work team in Heart-Head-Heart practice, application, and story-sharing. These can be done in huddles, staff meetings, or via a buddy system	Habit-Builder Guide
Coaching and Feedback	• Conversations with Individuals: Team Leader schedules three short meetings with each individual; format provided. • Peer observation and coaching • Team leader rounding on staff	Heart-Head-Heart Toolbox
Recognition, Reinforcement and Sustainment	• Reminder cards, posters, Pat-on-the-Back cards, and more	Heart-Head-Heart Toolbox

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Great Tool: Video Introduction to Team Leader's Action Plan

Communicating Empathy includes a video in which a leadership development professional walks program managers and team leaders through the Team Leader's Action Plan.

- If you are conducting the program with your own work team, we suggest watching the video to review and get a feel for the steps in your Action Plan.

- If there are multiple teams and other team leaders involved:
    - Convene this group, show the video and address questions and concerns.
    - Provide team leaders with access to the video and have them watch it on their own. Then, you can hold a live or virtual follow-up meeting to handle their questions and concerns.

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6. Sustainment and Further Effectiveness

While team leaders work through their Action Plan to help their teams master Heart-Head-Heart and build it into their everyday responsibilities, as program manager you begin planning what your organization needs for sustainment and further improvement.

Option 1.
Identify a select few tactics for ongoing use to keep Heart-Head-Heart top-of-mind and an enduring and enforced job expectation.

Many of the tools in the Toolbox can be repurposed to assure Sustainment—tools related to reminders, coaching, stories, recognition, and mutual support that make Heart-Head-Heart the universal language that ensures empathic communication by all staff to the benefit of patients, families and the entire healthcare team. **Note:** Be sure to plan an onboarding process for new team members via your organization's new employee orientation or department-specific orientation, so that they also learn the Heart-Head-Heart method and know that communicating with empathy is a job expectation for everyone on the team.

Option 2.
Expand staff skill sets further.

Consider further strengthening empathic communication skills by training staff in the concrete skills for communicating with caring. The Language of Caring for Staff program is a proven program that engages staff in mastering and using the evidence-based communication skills that further strengthen people's effectiveness with Heart communication. We encourage you to contact us to discuss your progress, strengths, and concerns so we can help to customize a solution that builds on your hard work and meets you and your organization's needs best.

For more information, please email customerservice@languageofcaring.org or call 314-300-7701

Note: More to Come!

The Language of Caring team is continuing to build programs and tools to help you go deeper and become even more effective with the *Communicating Empathy* program. Watch your email for information…

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The *Communicating Empathy* program kit contains all program guides, videos, thumbnails of Participant Handbook pages, and all other tools and materials. Your purchase entitles you to use these resources ONLY within your organization for the contracted number of participants as outlined in your purchase agreement. You may print and copy all guides and resources as needed for internal use, except *The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook*. You are not permitted to copy this book in whole or in part. You will need to purchase a copy of *The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook* for every person who participates in the Program/Workshop(s).

Following Intellectual Property Laws

You may not:

- Share videos, the workshop, workshop plans, or any other resources with anyone outside of your organization.
- Offer The *Communicating Empathy* program or the Heart-Head-Heart method for commercial purposes, charge a fee or generate revenue from its sale.
- Take any resources, materials, guides, or any other related items with you when you resign your position. All materials are property of the original purchasing organization.

We want to close with a Heart-Head-Heart message for YOU.

Heart: We realize that you are very busy and that leading your team through the *Communicating Empathy* program takes time, focus and commitment! We know this is a real challenge given your many responsibilities and pressures.

Head: The fact is, you have a golden opportunity to strengthen your impact on the human experience in healthcare by communicating with empathy in YOUR interactions. You also have an opportunity to help your team refocus on their caring purpose and embrace and use Heart-Head-Heart to be more effective, empathic communicators.

Heart: THANK YOU for all you're doing to engage your team in making their caring visible for the sake of patients, families and coworkers. Your leadership is nothing short of INSPIRING, and we really appreciate you for it.

Want to share stories? Ask questions? Seek guidance?

Contact us at customerservice@languageofcaring.org.

Connect with Us!

You've guided your team through *Communicating Empathy: The Heart-Head-Heart Method*. To help you keep building the momentum….

Follow us for tips, tools, updates, webinar invitations, and more:

Subscribe to our free monthly e-newsletter!

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