EXPLOITATION - EMPATHY CONTINUUM

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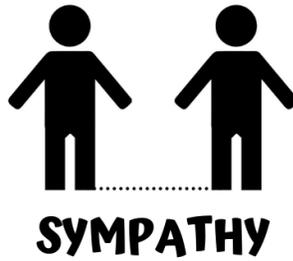
EXPLOITATION	SYMPATHY	EMPATHY
Treating one group *better* than another	Treating others the way *we* want to be treated∗	Treating others the way *they* want to be treated∗
Story centers the reader "You're the hero!"	Story centers the nonprofit: "We're the heroes!"	Story centers the community "They are the heroes!"
"I never considered whether this language or image might offend someone..."	"*I* wound't be offended by this language or image..."	"How do you feel about this language or image? Please help me understand your view."
Focus on the "victim" (How bad the situation is)	Focus on the helper (How great the nonprofit is)	Focus on the community (How resilient the group is)
Story blames the group or culture for their challenges	Story erases or minimizes the culture: "They're just like us"	Story includes values, beliefs, and motivations of the culture
Observation is judgmental: "They're doing it all wrong"	Observation is projective: "That's not how I would do things"	Observation suspends judgement: "There must be a good reason why they do things the way they do"
Organization has all the solutions and knows best	Organization focuses on intent over impact	Organization shares vulnerability and humility, and admits its mistakes and failures
Story is overly negative and focuses on extreme suffering	Story is overly positive and minimizes the hardship and pain of the community	Story attempts to convey a truthful balance of hardship and resilience
Organization doesn't have anything to learn	Organization is open to learning but not changing	Organization is willing to be changed by what it learns
Feedback is not collected	Feedback is collected but not used	Feedback is incorporated into all communications

∗The above definitions of sympathy and empathy were coined by sociologist Milton Bennett in 1979. All other content and graphics are copyright © 2021 Philanthropy without Borders. All rights reserved. Please share freely, cite properly, and ask for permission.

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