WHAT COULD EMPATHY LOOK LIKE FROM A COMPANY IN TODAY'S CULTURE

FEBRUARY 20. 2019

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

This research sought to explore what could empathy look like from a company in today's culture.
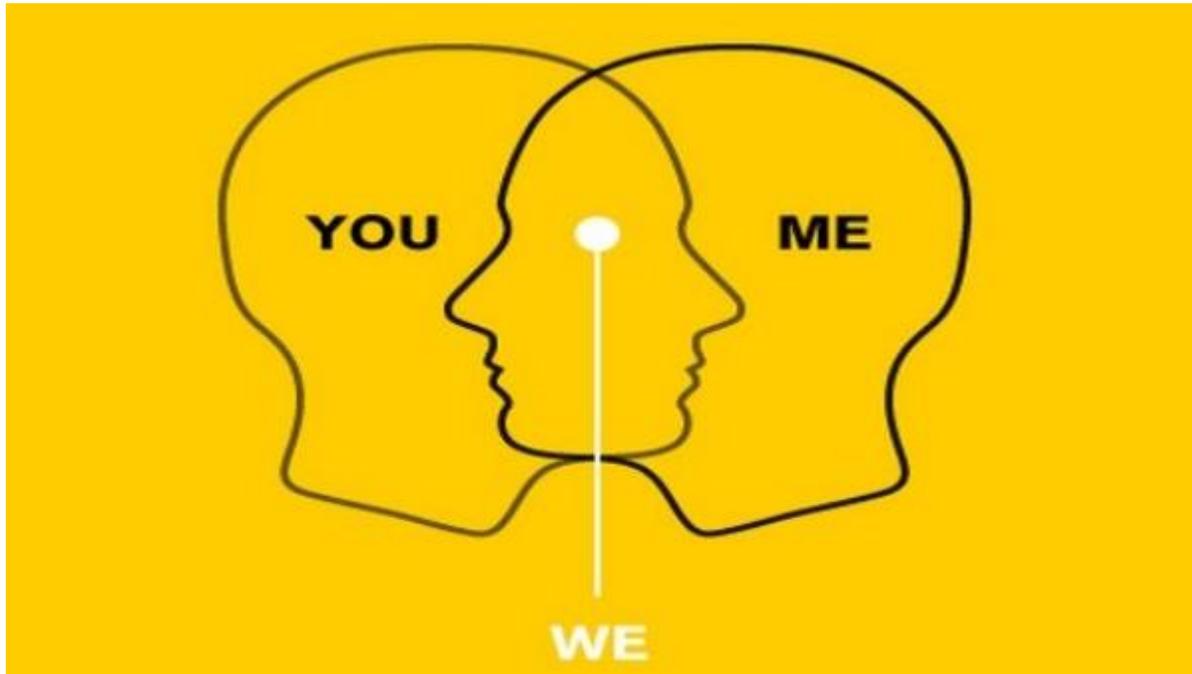
SUMMARY

Our research indicates that there is a strong desire for companies to embrace and display empathetic qualities, and that desire will continue to grow as solidarity and empathy are built through digital media. When digital and social media seem to move at lightning speed, corporations need to continually seek to understand how to authentically engage their consumers and empathize. Companies are seeing that they can become more empathetic through internal reflection and a commitment to more empathetic leadership, which can filter down into the corporate culture and economic model.

Rather than viewing empathy as a "soft skill," companies must regard it as a hard and essential skill from the CEO on down. Moving slowly towards the middle is no longer an option; the bow needs to bend so that empathy and corporate mentality can meet in a space that is unchartered territory full of innovative possibilities.

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Empathy is at the heart of who we are because we are naturally hard-wired for social connection over self-centeredness, argues co-founder of The School of Life, Roman Krznaric, a prominent researcher and speaker on the topic.[1] Yet if you watch the news or spend any time on social media, you might believe that our society is facing an empathy deficit of global-warming proportions: 70% of Americans have experienced online harassment, and shouting matches have become par for the course on cable news, particularly in political coverage.

Despite what we're seeing politically and the increasing vitriol on social and traditional media, it is incorrect to assume that we're careening toward a compassionless future. There is evidence to suggest that empathy is an emerging societal need.

Empathy, it should be noted, is not the same as sympathy. Sympathy is internally focused; "feeling sorry" for another as a result of perceiving his or her distress. Empathy is externally focused. It's an understanding and ability to vicariously experience the feelings and experiences of others, based on an accurate perception of another's situation, without having those feelings/experiences communicated in an objectively explicit way.[3,4]

To understand the differences between sympathy and empathy in society, political and social theorists Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres developed the metaphor of "The Miner's Canary." It isn't until the canary dies that people realize there is a serious problem that needs to be solved. A sympathetic response is to give the canaries a gas mask. An empathetic response sees the canary's death and asks, *why am I operating in a way that puts anyone in danger of dying?*[5] Empathy works to understand the whole by seeing beyond itself. Its aim is to build and innovate rather than to save.

EMPATHY GOES VIRAL – AFFECTING CHANGE AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

We see evidence of empathy in action, though it may not get as much media coverage as it deserves, from everyday people all around us. It is people, not the corporate world, leading on the empathy front. Why? In a word, connection. As the world gets closer through social media and greater ease of travel, we're seeing a shift from the shallowness of sympathetic responses to the authenticity of empathetic ones.

Empathy is something people are seeking – those "good moments" that bring opportunities for people to connect. People are not waiting for marketing cues or corporate action. Rather than relying on quick fixes based on expediency, they're showing empathetic behavior to create change locally and globally.

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

After struggling with PTSD for years after his service in the Iraq War, veteran Andrew Manzi started Warrior Surf, giving free surf lessons in South Carolina to help provide healing to fellow vets and their families. He told CNN it provides a way for veterans to reconnect with the military families they lost touch with once their service ended.

Mona Patel, who lost part of her leg in a car accident at age 17, founded the San Antonio Amputee Foundation to help fellow amputees through peer support, resources and athletic activities, as well as home and car modifications. Between 30 and 60 amputees gather each month to share their stories and get inspired by each other's strength in the face of adversity.[6]

Social entrepreneur Samir Lakhani, while volunteering in Cambodia as a college student, wanted to do something to improve sanitation in rural communities. He founded Eco Soap Bank, an organization that collects used bars of soap from Cambodian hotels, sanitizes and recycles them, while also providing hygiene education in local schools. The soap recyclers are all local women who were struggling to find a source of reliable income. His organization has donated more than 186,000 bars of soap in three years.[6]

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

The above examples are all indicative of individuals who understood and internalized the challenges and unmet needs of a specific group – in some cases because they went through similar experiences as the people they're helping – and responded to those needs in an empathetic way. Given the need for empathy and the value people place on it, what does this mean for corporate leadership?

Perhaps taking their cue from people- their consumers in particular, organizations are starting to see the need for empathetic leaders.[7] Social media makes the corporate world increasingly immediate and intimate, adding pressure to corporations to be truly responsive and empathetic. According to the Forbes Coaches Council, "empathy may be key to helping businesses grow, allowing leaders to relate to people and ideas around them."[8]

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Barnaby Lashbrooke, founder and CEO of virtual assistant platform Time Etc., has said it took him several years to work out that empathy is the key to strong, positive leadership. "Without it you won't communicate your direction and vision in a way that resonates," he said. "At a simpler level, people don't like or respect leaders who cannot empathize."[9]

Bianca McCann, Chief Human Resources Officer at BetterWorks, has studied the subject of empathy in the office. She noted that "having powerful empathetic conversations is a critical piece of being a great manager, and to truly hear the employee, deep listening and suspended judgment are needed skills. Yet in the busy world in which managers are entrenched, both of these skills are a real challenge."[10]

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

While there has been a lot of talk and research on the qualities of empathetic leaders, what does it mean for companies to show empathy and what do consumers expect? We wanted to examine, in an aspirational way, what empathy might look like from a corporate standpoint. How might an empathetic company behave?

Based on research that we conducted on the qualities of empathetic leaders, we identified seven qualities that companies should have to be considered empathetic. We then surveyed 1,000 Americans online between May 21 and May 25, 2018.

em • pa • thy

n. /'em-pə-thē/ or /ɛmpəθi/

the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

Merriam Webster

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

We found most Americans feel that all of the following qualities are extremely or very important to a company being considered empathetic, setting a high bar for corporate expectations:[11]

- Kindness – Lead from the heart and use the kindness of their spirit in how they treat and think about people. (59%)

- Active Communication – Rely on communication as a two-way, collaborative process as a catalyst for change. (59%)

- Self-control – Seek to understand first and react second. (59%)

- Adverse to toxic behaviors – Set boundaries on people that exhibit negative behaviors. (58%)

- Other-centered – Continually seek to understand how customers and employees are doing, what they need and how they feel. (57%)

- Self-aware – Transparently lead through their own challenges and fears, and then help their employees and customers through theirs. (56%)

- Unselfish – Companies that understand they get more from giving than from getting. (55%)

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

To be a truly empathetic company, expectations are extremely high to exhibit behaviors that would transform the corporate persona.

	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not Sure
Kindness- Companies that lead from the heart and use the kindness of their spirit in how they treat and think about people.	26%	33%	28%	6%	2%	6%
Self-control- Companies that seek to understand first and react second	24%	35%	28%	5%	1%	6%
Active Communication – Companies that rely on communication as a two-way, collaborative process as a catalyst for change	24%	35%	28%	5%	2%	6%
Adverse to toxic behaviors- Companies that set boundaries on people that exhibit negative behaviors.	26%	32%	27%	6%	2%	7%
Other-centered- Companies that continually seek to understand how employees and customers are doing, what they need and how they feel	23%	34%	28%	6%	2%	7%
Self-aware- Companies that transparently lead through their own challenges and fears, and then help their employees and customers through theirs.	21%	35%	30%	5%	2%	7%
Unselfish- Companies that understand that they get more from giving than from getting	25%	30%	29%	8%	2%	6%

n=1003

■ Extremely important ■ Very important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not very important ■ Not at all important ■ Not Sure

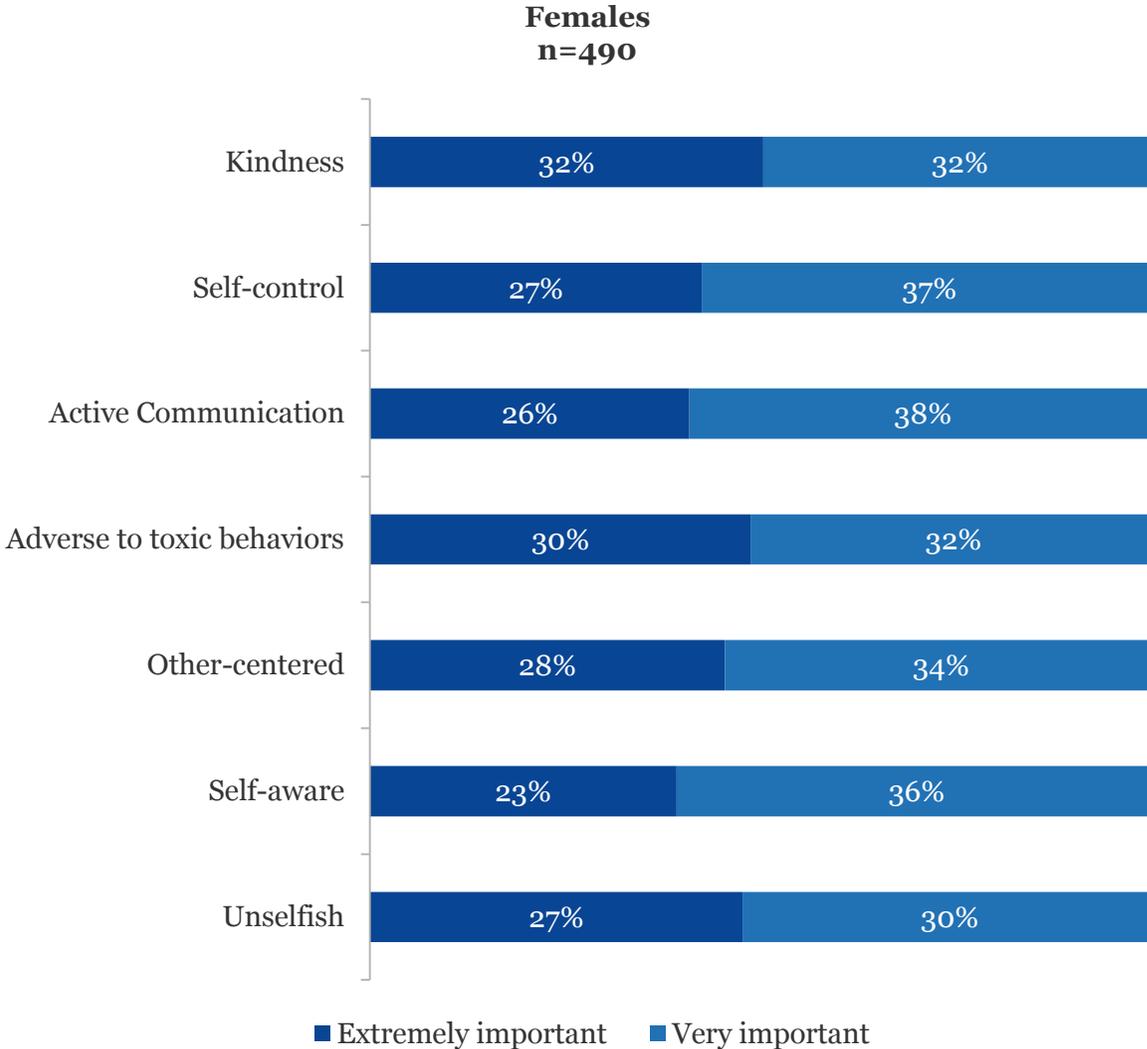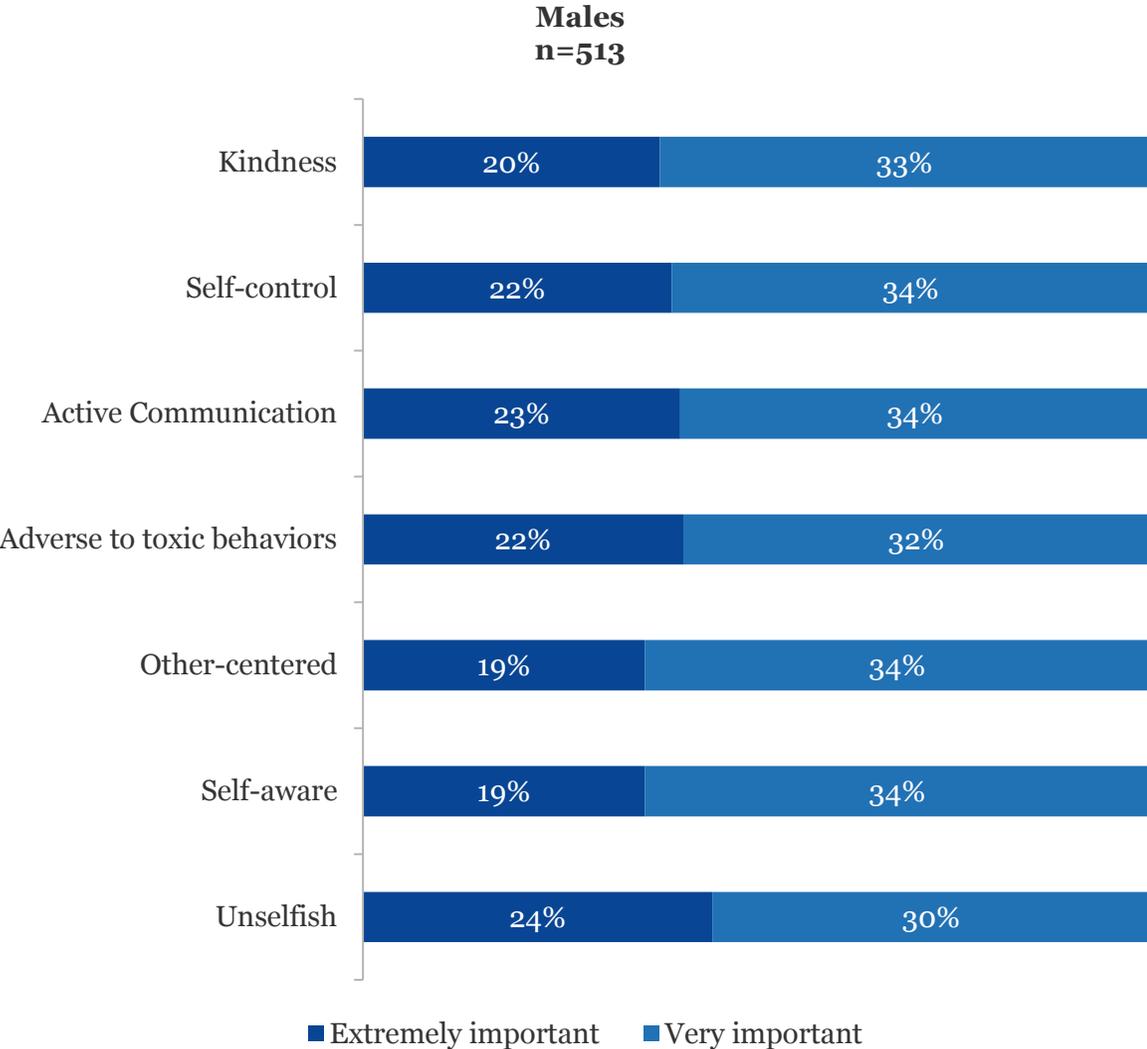TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE [q13] How important is it for a company to exhibit each of the following qualities in order to be considered an empathetic company or a company showing empathy?

Women see even greater importance in each of the above empathetic company qualities compared to men. Among the top three most empathetic company qualities are:[11]

- Kindness (64% of women vs. 53% of men)

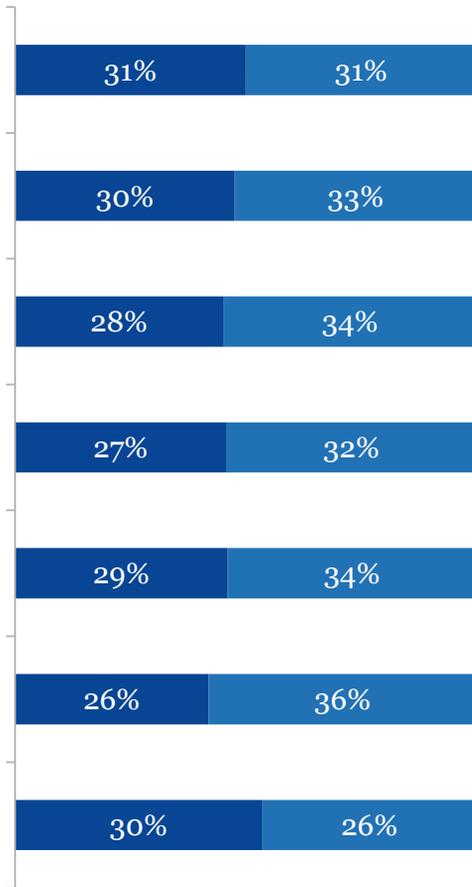- Active Communication (64% vs 56%)

- Self-control (64% vs. 57%)

Millennials see greater importance in Empathetic Company qualities compared to other generations.

HOW CAN COMPANIES SHOW EMPATHY?

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Women see greater importance in Empathetic Company Qualities compared to men.

Males
n=513

Quality	Extremely important	Very important
Kindness	20%	33%
Self-control	22%	34%
Active Communication	23%	34%
Adverse to toxic behaviors	22%	32%
Other-centered	19%	34%
Self-aware	19%	34%
Unselfish	24%	30%

■ Extremely important ■ Very important

Females
n=490

Quality	Extremely important	Very important
Kindness	32%	32%
Self-control	27%	37%
Active Communication	26%	38%
Adverse to toxic behaviors	30%	32%
Other-centered	28%	34%
Self-aware	23%	36%
Unselfish	27%	30%

■ Extremely important ■ Very important

[q13] How important is it for a company to exhibit each of the following qualities in order to be considered an empathetic company or a company showing empathy?
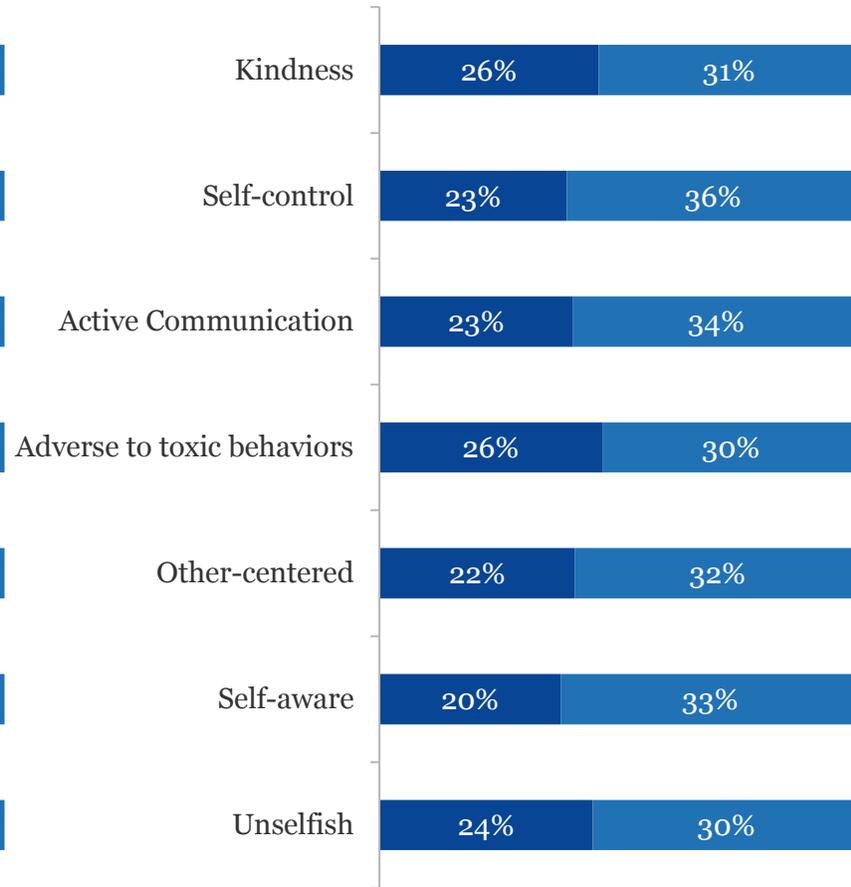
Millennials see greater importance in Empathetic Company qualities compared to other generations.
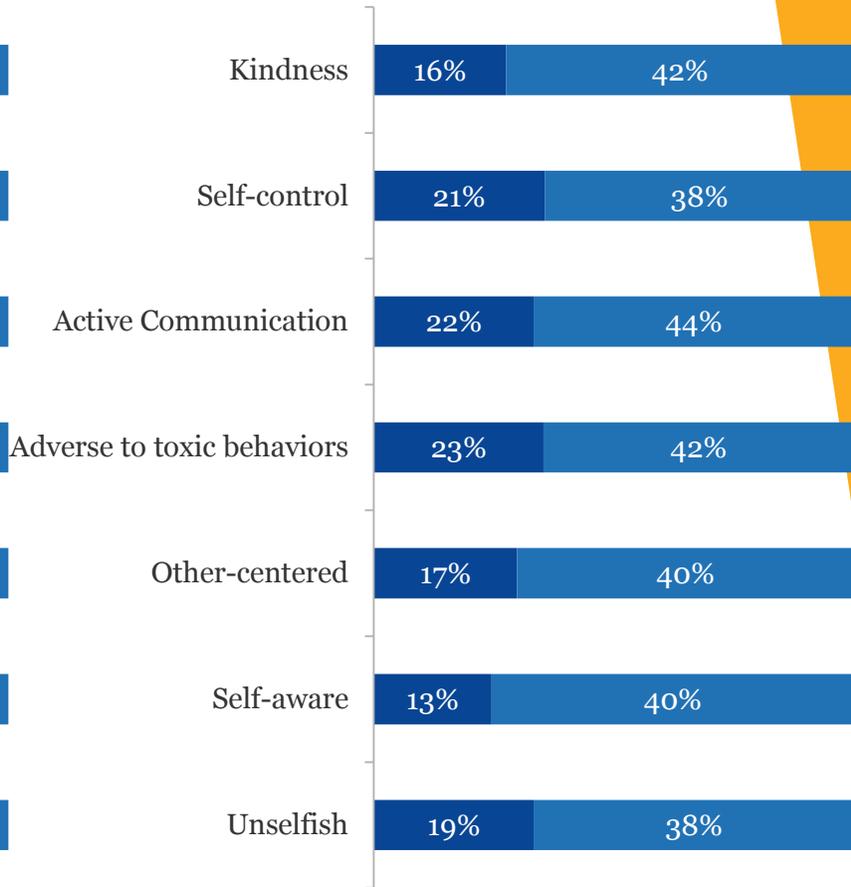
Millennials
n=290

Quality	Extremely important	Very important
Kindness	31%	31%
Self-control	30%	33%
Active Communication	28%	34%
Adverse to toxic behaviors	27%	32%
Other-centered	29%	34%
Self-aware	26%	36%
Unselfish	30%	26%

Generation X
n=572

Quality	Extremely important	Very important
Kindness	26%	31%
Self-control	23%	36%
Active Communication	23%	34%
Adverse to toxic behaviors	26%	30%
Other-centered	22%	32%
Self-aware	20%	33%
Unselfish	24%	30%

Baby Boomers
n=141

Quality	Extremely important	Very important
Kindness	16%	42%
Self-control	21%	38%
Active Communication	22%	44%
Adverse to toxic behaviors	23%	42%
Other-centered	17%	40%
Self-aware	13%	40%
Unselfish	19%	38%

■ Extremely important ■ Very important

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

METHODOLOGY
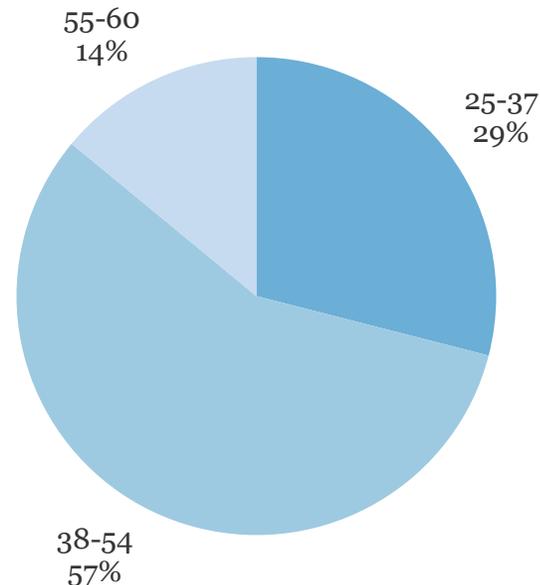
TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Methodology

TRUE Global Intelligence conducted an online survey among 1,000 respondents in the U.S from 5/21/18 - 5/25/18. The sample was representative for gender and region.
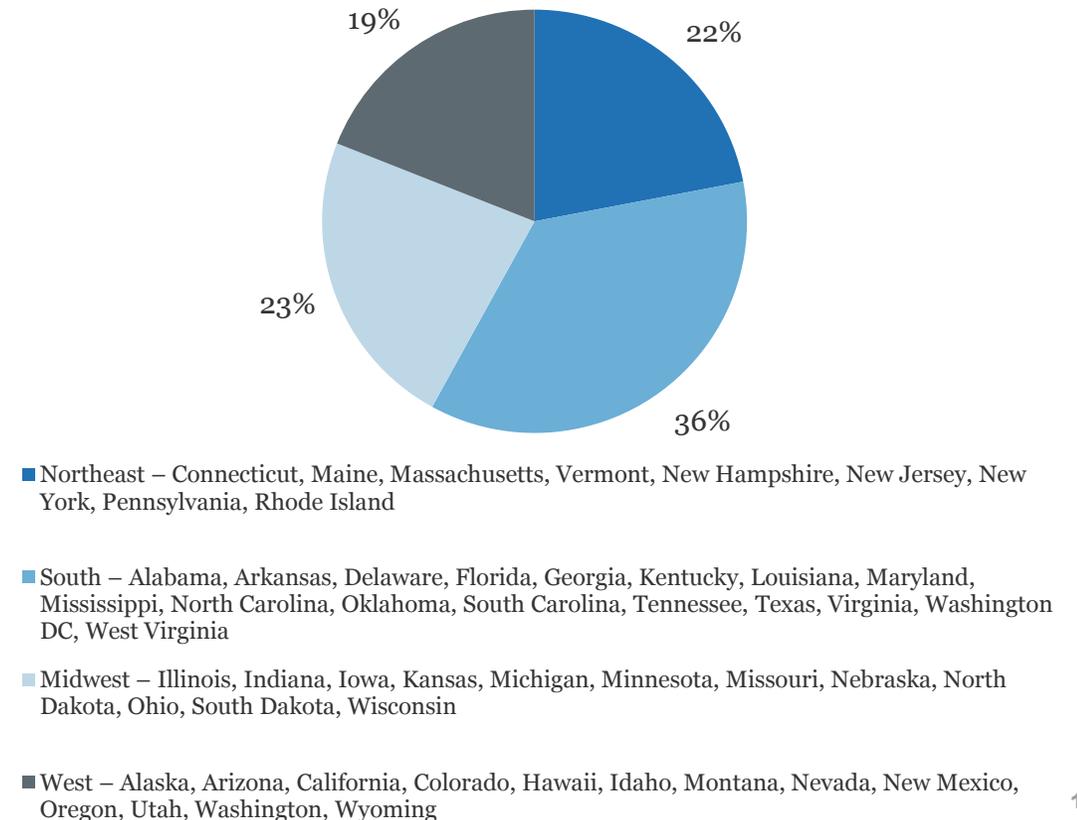
Gender

Male 51%
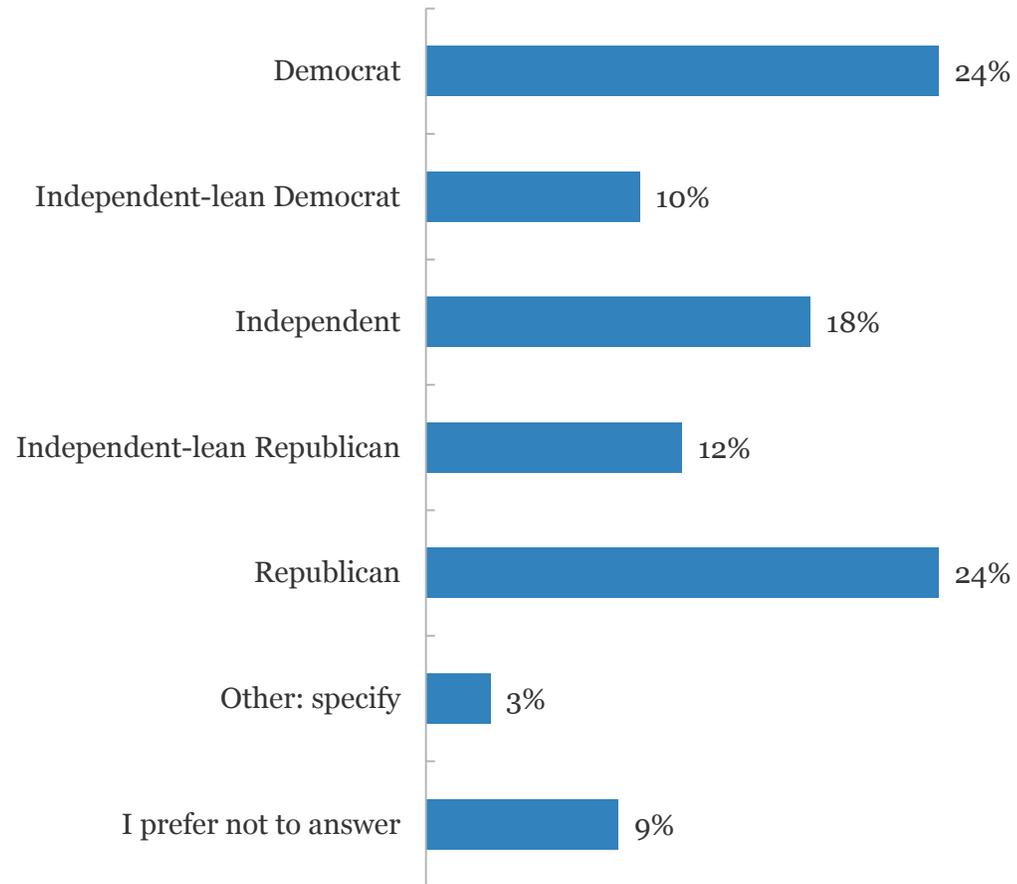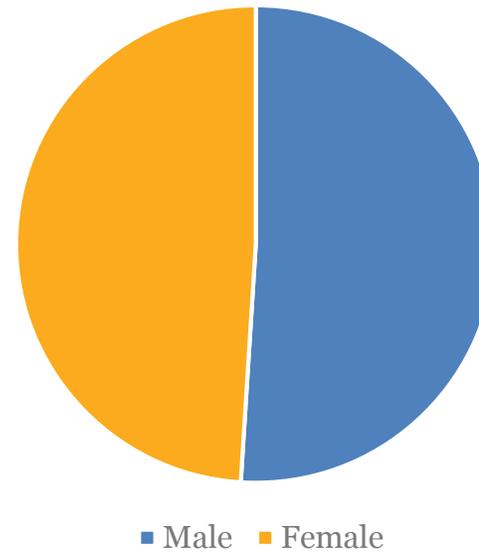Female 49%
Prefer not to say 0%

■ Male ■ Female ■ Prefer not to say

Age

25-37 29%
38-54 57%
55-60 14%

Region

Northeast 22%
South 36%
Midwest 23%
West 19%

■ Northeast – Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island

■ South – Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington DC, West Virginia

■ Midwest – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

■ West – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Political Party
n=1003

Democrat — 24%

Independent-lean Democrat — 10%

Independent — 18%

Independent-lean Republican — 12%

Republican — 24%

Other: specify — 3%

I prefer not to answer — 9%

Gender
n=1,003

■ Male ■ Female

Region
n=1,003

■ Northeast ■ South ■ Midwest ■ West

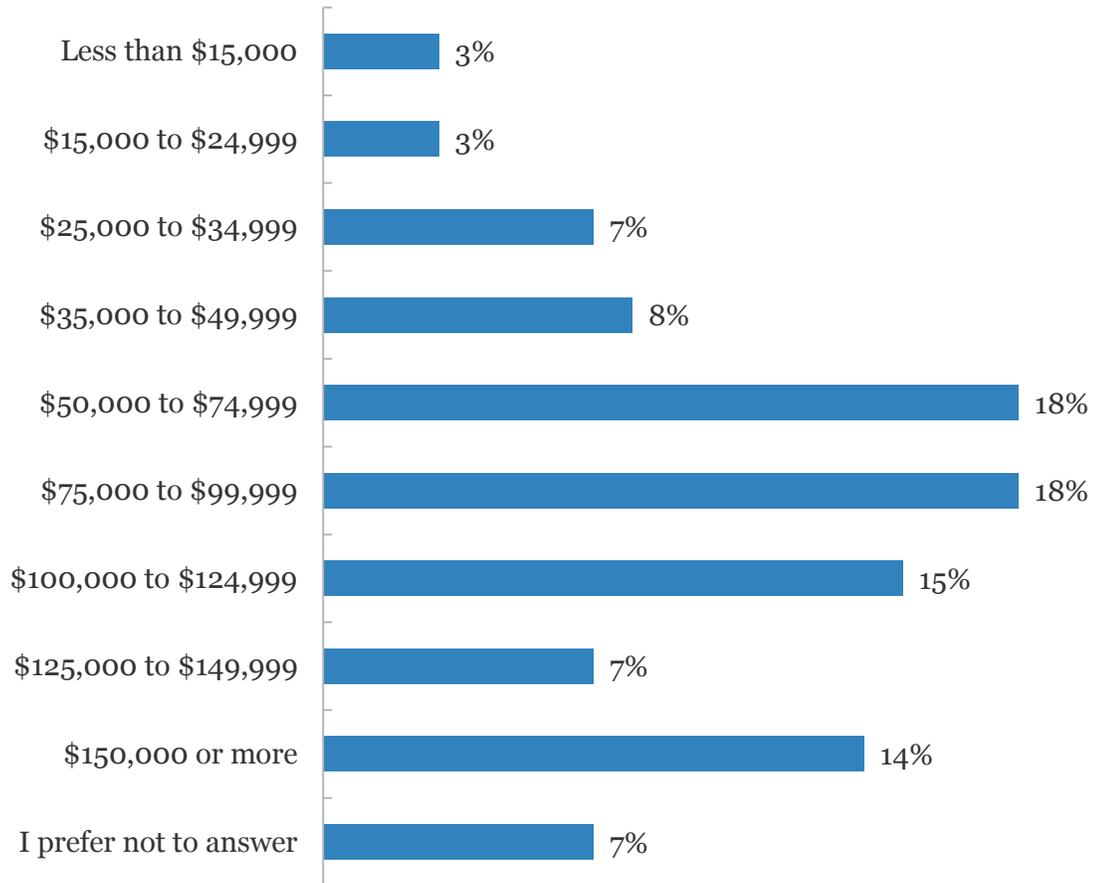[d1] Which of the following best describes you?

[d2] Regardless of how you are registered, which of the following best describes you?

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

Income
n=1003

Income	Percentage
Less than $15,000	3%
$15,000 to $24,999	3%
$25,000 to $34,999	7%
$35,000 to $49,999	8%
$50,000 to $74,999	18%
$75,000 to $99,999	18%
$100,000 to $124,999	15%
$125,000 to $149,999	7%
$150,000 or more	14%
I prefer not to answer	7%

Education
n=1003

Education	Percentage
Some high school	1%
High school graduate	9%
Some college	17%
Associate degree	10%
Bachelor's degree	36%
Master's degree	20%
Doctorate	6%
I prefer not to answer	1%
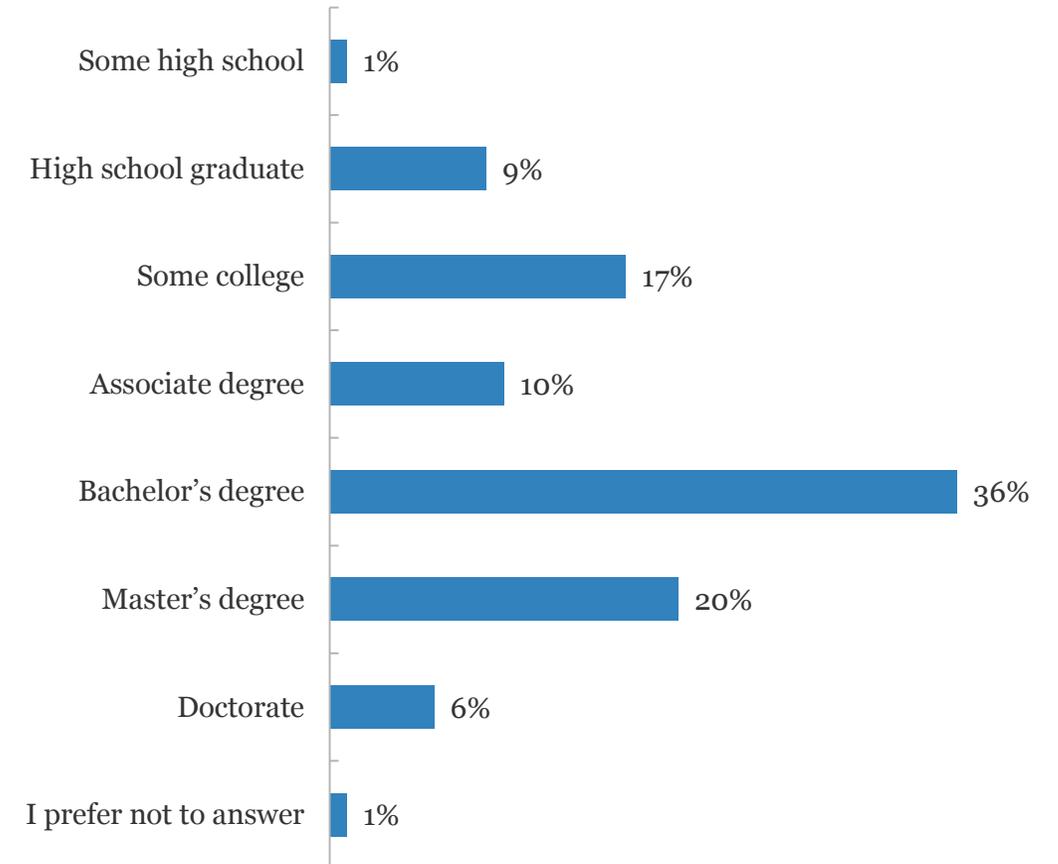
[d3] Which of the following best describes your annual household income, before taxes?

[d4] What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE

APPENDIX

1 Krznaric R. Empathy: Why it Matters and How to Get It. TarcherPerigee. Nov. 4, 2014.

2 Krznaric R. Five ways to be more empathetic. Time. Nov. 6, 2014. http://time.com/3562863/5-ways-to-be-more-empathetic/

3 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary.*

4. Center for Building a Culture of Empathy. Definition of empathy. http://cultureofempathy.com/References/Definitions.htm

5. Guinier L, Torres G. The Miner's Canary. Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy. Harvard. April 2003.

6. CNN Heroes. 2017 https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/11/01/tta-17-mixed.cnn/video/playlists/2017-top-10-cnn-heroes/

7. Gill B. Empathy is crucial to any personal or professional relationship. Here's how to cultivate it. Forbes. Nov. 17, 2017. https://www.forbes.com/sites/bhaligill/2017/11/17/empathy-is-crucial-to-any-personal-or-professional-relationship-heres-how-to-cultivate-it/#403b15677961

8. Forbes Coaches Council. 11 ways leaders can develop empathy. Forbes. Jan. 13, 2017. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/01/13/11-ways-leaders-can-develop-empathy/#5f1949cf37b6

9. Coleman A. The leap of faith: from startup founder to CEO. Forbes. April 15, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisoncoleman/2018/04/15/the-leap-of-faith-from-startup-founder-to-ceo/#75ce3e3c54fb

10. Lipman V. How important is empathy to successful management? Forbes. Feb. 24, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2018/02/24/how-important-is-empathy-to-successful-management/#67b63b90a46d

11. Online survey conducted May 25-21, 2018 by FleishmanHillard with 1,000 respondents in the U.S. The sample was representative for gender and region.

TRUE Global Intelligence, the in-house research practice of FleishmanHillard, conducted this research as an online survey. The sample size consisted of 1,000 Americans aged 18 years and older and was fielded between May 25 and May 21, 2018. The margin of error is +/- 3% and is higher for subgroups.

For more information:

Catherine Reynolds
Senior Vice President and Partner
catherine.reynolds@trueglobalintelligence.com

Natasha Kennedy
Global Managing Director
natasha.kennedy@trueglobalintelligence.com

TRUE GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE