

Empathy In Marketing Students: Are We Missing The Boat In Marketing Education?

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STUDENT: I am so excited. I have an opportunity to work for my aunt and uncle. They want me to develop a marketing strategy for a high-end bed they produce and bring in from Africa.

INSTRUCTOR: That sounds really exciting. Who is the target market?

STUDENT: The bed is very unique and stylish. It is also very expensive, so I think the target market is Baby Boomers.

INSTRUCTOR: Okay. Sounds good so far.

STUDENT: But I don't know how to market to Baby Boomers. I'm not in that generation, of course, and all the examples we use in class have to do with marketing to the Millennials. I don't know where to start. This is an actual scenario that one of the authors of this manuscript experienced in a conversation with a talented, Millennial marketing student with lots of potential who, surprisingly, does not know where to start in marketing a product to Baby Boomers. And it is likely not the lack of knowledge of what a marketing strategy is or what it is comprised of; rather, it is, at least partly, what we believe to be a lack of *empathy* on this student's part. As educators, we seek out examples and cases that will be *relevant* to students and, in turn, increase their *engagement*, and in many cases that means using examples and cases that involve Millennials. But are we missing the boat when it comes to educating marketing students and making them ready to be effective marketers when they graduate? Is *empathy* necessary for developing effective marketing strategies, especially those marketing strategies that target consumers who are different from the marketer preparing the strategies (in generation/age, gender, ethnicity, or any other variable we might consider important)? If so, can we teach empathy and, in turn, will empathy make marketing majors more effective marketers? Are we leaving out empathy as a desired skill for marketing students to have? We suspect the answer is "yes" to these questions and begin to explore them in this research.