



LISTENING

"...But everyone must be quick to listen, slow to speak,..." James 1:19

One of the key managerial competences that every supervisor must be able to develop is that of listening. We consider listening a passive process. In truth, it is one of the most demanding and difficult skills to master. We put such great effort and thought into choosing our words; we put energy into "getting the last word in" as if the one speaking is the one with power in a dialogue. Truth be told, often times the most powerful and productive person between two individuals conversing is he or she who is listening. The one who is receiving the information is at a great advantage to influence the direction, conversation and resolution of issues.



Let us look at the levels of listening:

PRETEND LISTENING: Let us be honest. This is something each of us do more often than we would like to admit. It might mean making some eye contact, giving some nods, but our mind and attentive processes tend to be somewhere else. It is not really listening at all, but waiting for someone to stop moving their mouth so that we can tell them what is really going on.

SELECTIVE LISTENING: Selective listening is the process of receiving information, but only picking and either choosing things to register that we can refute, or that will reinforce an already arrived at conclusion. This is not listening, but picking our words that we find more sympathetic to our own position or views.

ATTENTIVE LISTENING: Attentive listening is when you do really attend to the word, emotions, person that is before you. You are working hard to take in as much information as possible, listening to not only the words but the music and meaning as well. As admirable as all of this is, it is not the most profound and deepest form of listening.

(Please turn over)

EMPATHIC LISTENING: Steve Covey in “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” clearly identifies the skill of “emphatic listening.” This is listening at its most profound level. It is listening without a thread of judgment, but with extreme curiosity. Covey says that we often confuse sympathy with empathy. Sympathy is agreement, empathy is understanding. It does not have to make sense to you, or be of value, to you; it is of value and makes sense of the other. The challenge is to get out of our own autobiography enough to invest energy and intellect into the stance, perceptions, values and emotions of another person.

Monitor you own levels of listening in the course of a day and see which level you use most often and what the circumstances are that allow you to listen with empathy.

Tips to Becoming a Skilled Listener

1. Make the intentional choice to listen. This means that you stop talking, to others, and to yourself. Put much more energy into being receptive, not productive.
2. Invest in the other person’s point of view, no matter how offensive it is to you. As an exercise, listen to a point of view that is as far away from yours as possible. Listen, take it in and see how it makes sense, not that you believe it, or agree with it, but that you simply understand it.
3. Look, act and be interested. Sending the message of disinterest, or disbelief will stop a dialogue quicker than anything will. You want to create an atmosphere of understanding and you must “seek first to understand, and then be understood.”
4. Do not ever interrupt, block, or stop communication. Sit way past your tolerance level.
5. Make your comments on the interests present, not in your position. Give feedback to the listener that you hear what is behind the position they are staking out. This is the emotional as well as the cognitive interests.
6. Listen to the words and the music. Values, emotions, and interests all are expressed in dialogue. You miss a great deal if you only tend to the thoughts.
7. Try not to judge or evaluate as long as you can. Listen to the person, the message and the continuity of thought. The question is never, “Why does this person want this?” but “What does this person really want?”
8. Pay attention to your own instruments. What are your intentions and emotions? What is negotiable for you and what is not negotiable?
9. If anger or negative emotions surface, work hard to add light, not heat to the process.
10. Allow silences and pauses, ask open ended questions. Use constant feedback to make sure that you are getting the right information.
11. Remember, the more you listen, the more you will be listened to.

