



Listening Leaders



What percentage of your time with others are you talking and what percentage are you listening?

I don't ask that for a "correct" answer because there really isn't one, but it's good to think about that occasionally. I often find that leaders, because they are trying to get things done, move initiatives forward, get others on board with change, etc. spend a lot of time talking and often don't have as much time to just listen to others.

As you go through the next week, just pay attention to how often you are asking your staff questions that truly open the door for them to share with you. What kinds of things do you



When you talk,
you are only
repeating what
you already know.
But if you listen,
you may learn
something new.

**If this topic interests you,
here's another great article
to read about being a
Listening Leader:**

**Stories of Leaders
Who Listened**

want them to share? Well, often times folks are unwilling to tell the boss what they think might not make the boss happy. Therefore, what do you get – you get what people think you want to hear, rather than what you need to hear.

So how do you get folks to talk so that you can listen? First, remember, if you ask for honest feedback or information and opinions, and then you disagree with what you hear in one form or another, then those folks will likely not open up with you in the future. It's ok to disagree with what they say, just continue asking questions first. Be genuinely curious. Wait to "discuss" it with them and just ask and keep asking. Then you might say, "This is all really great information". Let me chew on this or think about this a bit.

Here are some great questions to try:

- What do you need to do your job more efficiently or productively?
- What creates the greatest challenge for you on a daily basis?
- What's working really well?
- What could work better? Then follow-up and ask, "What would you do to make it better?"
- How can I help or what can I do to help?
- When someone shares a problem or challenge, ask, "Why is that?" Then, when they give you an answer, ask "And why is that?" Ask "why" five times at least. It's actually a process called "The Five Why's" that is designed to get to the root cause of problems so you're actually working on the right problem.

Here's an example:

What's not working?

- We're not getting orders to customers on time.

Why?



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**The word
LISTEN
contains
the same letters
as the word
SILENT.**

- Alfred Brendel

- Because the machine often shuts down which puts us behind schedule.

Why is the machine shutting down?

- Because a part gets overheated.

Why is that part getting overheated?

- Because the oil pump is inefficient.

Why is the oil pump inefficient?

- Because the oil filter gets clogged?

Why is the oil filter getting clogged?

- Because changing the oil filter is not on the regular maintenance schedule.

As you can see, solving the problem requires getting to the root of the matter, which is often not obvious in any industry or business.

So once you get people talking to you, what should you be listening for? Here are a few ideas:

1. Great ideas that could save money, improve efficiency, morale, employee engagement, collaboration, etc. You name it!
2. Complaints that actually show a need you could fill or a gap between reality and the ideal that creates opportunity for you and your team to shine by creating the solution to fill that gap or that need
3. Creative ways people are solving problems or generating next level methods or procedures that you can share with upper management to highlight the performance of your team (which, if you read my newsletter from March 2019 – *The Secret to Recognition as a Leader* which you can find on my website or [CLICK HERE](#)

**LISTENING IS
AN ART THAT
REQUIRES
ATTENTION
OVER TALENT,
SPIRIT OVER
EGO, OTHERS
OVER SELF.**

~dean jackson



We have TWO ears
and ONE mouth.

Use them
proportionately!



4. What obstacles are in the way of your employees or customers – something which often times requires the authority or clout of someone at your level to remove
5. What employees are doing that you need to reward, recognize, promote to others to help them gain recognition for promotions down the road
6. Where employees have stepped up or gone above and beyond that begs recognition
7. Who on your team has what strengths – so you can tap them to help solve a problem that needs a particular strength, or for succession planning or for special assignments
8. Who has leadership skills, people-management skills or an exceptional command of technical issues

Where and how do you create the opportunities for this type of listening and building rapport and relationships with your employees, you ask? In the book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, they highlight a practice called

MANAGEMENT BY WANDERING AROUND

MBWA is the practice of getting out from behind your desk, wandering around to workstations and employees, observing, asking questions and talking to employees one on one. The higher up the ladder you are on the org chart, the more this is actually a good idea and one that leaders in some of the best-run companies actually employ.

So get out there! Find out what is waiting for you to discover!

The hard work of listening requires getting out of the habit of doing vs. listening and assessing what you are hearing.

Listening requires that you stop talking – which is easier said than done and which requires conscious, deliberate behavior. It also requires not just hearing the words, but listening for



**Sometimes
remembering
what we teach
children is
really helpful as
an adult.**

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OVER SELF.**

~dean jackson

Upcoming Newsletters

July

Success Across the
Generations
by Guest Contributor
Peggy Bud.

August

The Success of
Teamwork

what is not being said, which may beg another question to get the person to open up and share what they may be reluctant about. It also means listening for the deeper meaning and reading between the lines and then, guess what, asking more questions. Remember, be CURIOUS as a leader!

Deep listening also means listening without an agenda, without interrupting, pausing to think about what was just said and not rushing off to the next topic, but fully exploring what you are hearing from the person.

Sometimes, leaders don't like listening because they interpret what they are hearing as complaining, which nobody really likes. Here's another perspective to adopt when you are faced with complaints. Is the complaint an indicator of a bigger problem? It may be a clue that major systems are not working or being implemented for maximum efficiency, productivity, accuracy, etc. Systems may not be talking to each other which may be reducing efficiency, productivity or accuracy or increasing costs of people, hours or customer complaints. Don't allow yourself as a leader to be kept in the dark simply because your employees don't want to tell you bad news or something they think you won't like. Be the leader who gets in there to understand what's going on and work with your employees to solve problems, make things better, remove obstacles and take advantage of opportunities to take things to a higher level or create the next best iteration of your product or service.

Listen and Learn,



Click below to schedule time with me.

September

Etiquette is Not Just for Grandma

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