

Chapter Four

Listening...



solves the people
problem!

... "Should a wise man answer with empty
knowledge,
And fill himself with the east wind? Should he
reason with unprofitable talk,
Or by speeches with which he can do no good?"

Job 15:1-3

Those committed to helping others achieve their goals understand the importance of being good listeners. Instead of trying to impress or entertain others, they focus on listening and showing genuine interest in learning about their gifts, talents, and abilities. Leaders can only positively impact others if they can build trust. Trust is established through listening, understanding strengths, considering potential, and gaining insight into concerns while guiding efforts to unlock potential. Understanding others requires leaders to shift their focus away from personal goals and ambitions and instead focus on developing more robust, deeper, and meaningful relationships.

Listening is not just a tool but a powerful catalyst for personal and professional development. It empowers individuals with insight and guidance, sharpening their vision and equipping them to overcome challenges in reaching their goals.

The most effective leaders exhibit a combination of ambition and an unwavering dedication to continuous learning. They recognize the importance of maintaining an open-minded approach and creating a nurturing environment that encourages the development of innovative ideas. This deliberate strategy enables them to consistently expand their knowledge and adapt, resulting in their evolution into even more influential and impactful leaders over time.

In a team meeting setting, an assertive leader often dominates conversations by interrupting others frequently and firmly stating their opinions, which limits opportunities for team input. While they may believe they are effectively conveying their ideas, their lack of active listening and overconfidence can result in misunderstandings and miscommunications within the group.



This behavior can lead to frustration and confusion among team members, prompting more questions and the need for clarifications to resolve issues. As a result, the leader may find themselves providing lengthy explanations to correct the situation, all while striving to uphold a strong leadership presence and avoid showing any vulnerability.

To prevent such challenges, it's crucial for the leader to find a balance between speaking and listening during discussions. They should actively engage with team members, ask clarifying questions, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their thoughts without being overshadowed.

Furthermore, it is important to challenge conventional assumptions about listening. Encouraging the summarization of others' perspectives, allowing speakers to complete their thoughts, and confirming understanding can greatly improve communication. By fostering a culture of open dialogue, active listening, and mutual respect, teams can enhance understanding and collaboration.

Effective leaders seamlessly combine ambition with a dedication to lifelong learning, recognizing the value of an open-minded mindset and a nurturing environment to cultivate innovative ideas. This purposeful growth allows them to evolve into influential leaders over time.

Many individuals face challenges in communication when they focus more on speaking than listening. This tendency can result in over-communication, creating a misleading sense of accomplishment and unnecessary elaboration to shape perception. Recognizing ineffective problem-solving and embracing accountability is crucial for enhancing both communication and behavior.

To improve communication dynamics, it's essential to maintain a balanced talk-to-listen ratio, pose relevant follow-up questions, and challenge stereotypical assumptions. Summarizing key points, allowing the speaker to finish their thoughts, and confirming understanding can significantly promote effective communication and collaboration.



“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 14:11 ESV

While it's common for individuals to interrupt, it's less common for them to examine their motives and change this habit. Some may interrupt because they don't value what the other person is saying, placing a higher value on their opinion instead. Others may interrupt to impress others with their knowledge, intellect, or intuition, interjecting an anticipated response that may not align with the communicator's expression. Some may get too excited about the conversation to let the other person finish their statement. One way to address this habit is to acknowledge when it's happening, allow the other party to speak, and allow silence for reflection and a proper response. Ultimately, the best way to assist others is to actively listen, find meaning, and understand the main idea expressed.

Leaders develop good listening skills by understanding the benefits and wanting to hear what their people say. To become better listeners, leaders must make **the head-heart connection**. This concept refers to **aligning intellectual understanding (head) with emotional empathy (heart)**. By giving their undivided attention to the other person, leaders can apply this concept to understand the speaker's needs, wants, or desires and grasp the message's whole meaning. They should set aside time to focus on the speaker's message and the message behind it, which requires listening to what is being said and not being said in the message. This process requires listening for content and feelings, which also consists of the interest, not just the listener's position. Avoid interruptions, as this can make the speaker feel disrespected. It is vital to promote empathy and acceptance as it becomes apparent that there are areas where the speaker may feel afraid or hurt.



“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.”

Romans 14:1 ESV

To truly grasp the message being conveyed, it is crucial to take into account the context and the underlying intention behind it. This requires a heightened sense of awareness and understanding. Emotional barriers, such as feelings of shame or discomfort, can pose challenges in interpreting the message objectively. A useful strategy to navigate this obstacle is to listen attentively to the speaker without interruptions, allowing them to fully express their thoughts, beliefs, or perspectives before making any judgments. Any judgment formed prior to listening attentively to the speaker becomes a preconceived notion that lends itself to biased communication.



Imagine a scenario where Marilyn is trying to express her concerns about a project in a meeting. However, her colleague, Justin, keeps interrupting her with his own opinions and suggestions before she can fully explain her perspective. As a result, Marilyn starts to feel frustrated and unheard, leading her to believe that Justin is not open to considering her point of view. This constant interruption creates a barrier to effective communication, as Justin's preconceived notions about the project prevent him from truly understanding Marilyn's concerns and insights. In this situation, the lack of attentive listening and the frequent interruptions hinder the ability to grasp the message being conveyed fully.

Constructive Criticism that Promotes Positive Change

When individuals gaze at their reflection in the mirror, it's common for them to experience discomfort. This unease often stems from a concern about facing judgment regarding their physical appearance. Individuals may also harbor uneasiness about receiving critiques about their character, values, or behavior. Embracing our flaws and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable can be challenging. This difficulty often arises from a weakness in expressing self-kindness and understanding.

Self-reflection involves the transformative process of examining one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors genuinely and openly. It requires individuals to confront their vulnerabilities and acknowledge their imperfections. By doing so, they can gain valuable insights into the root causes of their emotional distress. Self-reflection can be intimidating, especially for those struggling to address their issues.

However, embracing constructive criticism as a vital component of developing good listening skills can lead to meaningful growth and positive change. This practice demands honesty and the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. The resulting self-discovery can pave the way for improved communication skills, renewed hope, and personal, professional, and spiritual development.

This process can be a hard pill to swallow for those who do not like to take their medicine. That medicine comes in the form of constructive criticism, which helps people learn what problematic thoughts, emotions, or behaviors negatively impact their lives. During a discussion of a challenging issue, a problem is identified, evaluated, and approached with the intent to develop a beneficial solution. Just like medicine can be self-administered when a solution is prescribed, constructive criticism can be administered to lead to a solution in resolving the people problem.

How do you know that you are struggling with constructive criticism?

You become defensive at the first sign of feedback.

Defensiveness can be a roadblock in that process because it impacts one's attitude, ability to listen, and method of communication.

You forget to acknowledge the benefits of feedback.

Your growth, development, and healing from emotional distress depend on your ability to acknowledge some hard truths about yourself.

You are not listening for understanding of the feedback being provided.

If you are combative instead of thoughtful or solution-oriented, you must focus on understanding the comments or perspectives being presented.

You fail to acknowledge or appreciate the attempt to provide feedback that could benefit your success.

Acknowledge the other person's vulnerability by showing gratitude that they took a bold step in mentioning an observed area of improvement.

You rush to end the conversation to avoid further feedback.

There is a need to ask questions to deconstruct the feedback and understand the issue that needs clarification.

You avoid further communication with the person or discussion of the topic.

It takes a certain level of maturity to agree, disagree, or agree to disagree with feedback obtained AND maintain a healthy relationship.



Listening Checker

It's important to assess your listening skills to identify areas for improvement in developing effective communication skills. Ask someone who knows you well to evaluate your listening skills using the following questions to gain insight. Encourage them to elaborate on any answers indicating a 'no' response. Try not to interrupt or become defensive while receiving feedback on your listening ability during the conversation. List three ways you could improve your listening skills based on the answers received. Remember, each piece of feedback is an opportunity for personal growth.

1. Do I usually maintain eye contact with the speaker while they are talking?

Strategy for improvement:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. Do I wait for the speaker to finish talking before I respond?

Strategy for improvement:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. Do I make it a priority to understand the speaker's message?

Strategy for improvement:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

4. Do I demonstrate that I am consciously trying to check and control my emotions?

Strategy for improvement:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____