



Effective Listening

By Shae Hadden

We now have the ability to communicate more frequently with more people than ever before. And yet, there is something missing. Something that could help us avoid misunderstandings, resolve conflicts, build trust and increase our effectiveness as leaders. That something is the art of listening.

Listening is much more than just hearing words or reading body language.

Normally, even if we're interested in learning about what matters to someone, the best we can do is make assumptions and then leave it at that. Effective listening allows us to go beyond our assumptions, choose actions that will address everyone's unspoken concerns, and move things forward.

Listening is much more than just hearing words or reading body language. It requires that we:

- ✓ Be totally 'present' in the moment (not be distracted by other thoughts or activities)
- ✓ Be quiet and stop talking
- ✓ Accept the other person as they are (be non-judgmental and listen without censoring)
- ✓ Maintain an open mind
- ✓ Do not plan what we are going to do or say next
- ✓ Be willing to interact with whatever shows up in the moment.

Being listened to in this non-judgmental, 'generous' way creates a space for us to tap into our own wisdom and to create possibilities. When someone really listens to us, we can be inspired to invent solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.

Tips for Effective Listening

Listen with Intention

Commit to seeing how the world looks to the other person. Keep your attention focused on them, on what they are saying, on what they are not saying and on the non-verbal cues they are unconsciously giving you. Notice their energy level and mood. Listen deeply to ***what they are not saying*** to discover the essence of their concerns. If you find yourself holding an internal conversation in your head about whether you disagree or agree with them, remember to maintain an open mind.



Ask for Specifics

Focus your listening on what they are dissatisfied with and any opportunities they see. Ask direct questions and record the essence of what they say (not your opinions about their responses). Dissatisfactions and opportunities point the way to specific concerns.

Consider & Observe to Understand

Consider several aspects of what you have heard in your conversations with this person. Review what issues and events they consistently focus on, what they always take action to improve, what things quickly and frequently distract them and what they will interrupt almost anything for. Observe what you've heard in terms of themes, contradictions, assessments and anything you see that is missing.

Share Your Interpretation

Paraphrase what they have said and describe the underlying emotions you observe in their speaking. In the spirit of promoting mutual understanding, share your interpretation with the other person. Ask them to elucidate, correct and fine-tune what you offer to ensure you 'get' what they are trying to communicate. ***This is not the same as agreeing with them.*** In situations where people do not agree, creating this partial understanding changes the mood of the conversation to one of cooperation and increases the possibility of collaborating and resolving the conflict. Once you are both clear, you'll be able to easily begin to explore specific conditions of satisfaction that will address both of your concerns.

Be Compassionate and Consistent

Many people have never have experienced deep, generous listening. Be compassionate even if they are only comfortable speaking superficially. The more they experience being really listened to, the more they will be open to communicating more and also the more they will be willing to listen to you.

If relationships are the foundation for achieving anything in the world, then effective listening is one of the keys to success.

Professional actors and singers master effective listening as part of their craft. Whether we perform on a stage in front of an audience or in an organization in front of our colleagues or clients, mastering listening in this way can make the difference between giving an average performance and achieving extraordinary results. Leaders who *really* listen can learn more from the people they work with, can be more effective in their speaking and can do more good when they move into action.