

The Power of Listening - Transforming Leadership in the Age of Communication

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Abstract: *In today's age of communication, where social media platforms abound, the focus often lies on expressing ourselves. However, the art of listening, an essential aspect of effective communication, is often overlooked. This article explores the significance of listening, delving into its deeper meaning beyond hearing words. It discusses how mastering the skill of active listening can empower leaders to build trust, forge lasting relationships, and drive their teams towards achieving organizational goals. The article outlines key principles and essential listening skills, emphasizing the importance of empathy, creating a collaborative environment, and fostering genuine connections. By understanding the transformative potential of listening, leaders can navigate the ever-evolving corporate world with greater success and create a society where people listen to understand, not just to judge.*

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1. Introduction

Listening is the most powerful tool in the hands of leaders that can help them to reach to the pinnacle of Leadership. Unfortunately, most of us do not understand what listening is about. When I investigate into a possible reason for this gap, one obvious answer comes in front of me is we were rarely taught about how to listen during the time when we were studying in a school or a college or even a university. Across the world, all these educational institutions teach us how to speak, how to debate and argue. They teach us how to make judgements about others. Even the competition tests to get admission to high niche professional courses like M.B.A. have things like Group discussions which only teach us how to debate. Listening is unfortunately nowhere in the picture and is rarely taught in any of the schools, colleges, and universities across the globe. So, when we don't know how to listen and as such we also do not know how to understand others and their perspectives. Today, we have various business schools pass outs who are good speakers but not good listeners. and consequently, we have leaders across the corporate world who can speak, debate, argue, make judgements but cannot listen to understand. As a result of it, we are living in a society where we listen to debate, argue, make judgements, and respond but not listen to understand.

What is Listening?

Listening is not about hearing the other person but about more deeply understanding what other person feels. It is about understanding emotions or the message behind his/her words. It is getting to know what is said between the lines and means understanding the body language. **The secret behind good listening is that when someone knows that you have listened and have understood completely, you let them know that they matter to you, and this is important game changer when you are leading people.**

Understanding other person through careful listening is deeper than knowing the other person. It is possible you may be knowing a person but still may not be able to understand her/him. There is a significant difference between the

knowledge and understanding. Knowing is about collecting the facts while understanding is connecting emotions.

How Can Listening help you lead effectively?

When done in right manner, listening can transform managers into being effective leaders. Listening can help in following ways:

- It has the power of changing your perspective and placing you in other person's shoes.
- It can empower you to win hearts of your team and your stakeholders
- It can help you to build trust and lasting relationships with your teams which is the key to successful leadership in a corporate world.
- It shall finally equip you to drive your people to achieve the vision set by you for your organization.

2. Key Principles of Active Listening

1) Everyone is Unique

Everyone is born with unique attributes and has a personality type that creates lens through which they see the world. Two persons can see the same situation and yet see it entirely differently. Hence it's important to understand the personality type before you start listening as the words can be same, but their meaning shall be different depending upon their unique personality or traits or emotions.

2) Listen empathically

Do not only listen to the words of the other person but also understand their feelings. When one actually hears the other person's words and feelings, it builds empathy because it allows us to see things from other person's perspective. It helps in setting the foundation for meaningful relationships as it shows that you respect and care for the person you're hearing.

3) Create Environment:

As a leader, it is your prime responsibility to create an environment of collaboration and trust where everyone has a voice, everyone is granted respect and dignity and where they are allowed to discover, develop, share, and be appreciated for their contributions to the organization's shared purpose. This will encourage people to speak up and share their ideas. It is the shared collaboration and team effort which shall help you lead to the road of success.

Listening Skills that are important to learn**1) Focus your presence:**

Please consider the following before you attempt to listen anyone:

- a) Always put your phone away before you start listening
- b) Try to make eye to eye contact
- c) Always have an open body posture
- d) Lean forward while listening. It shows to the other person that you are listening.
- e) Nod your head when the other person speaks and share their concerns with you
- f) Please ensure to give your full attention to them.

2) Silence Your Mind:

This is about telling your mind to be quiet. Often our mind makes lot of noise and does not allow us to focus. Silencing your mind means silencing the chatter in your mind so you can catch all what other person is saying. It is about cleaning your mind and be in the present– not thinking about the future- next thing to say or the past. It will help you to completely absorb and understand what the other person is expressing.

3) Share Acknowledgements:

The verbal and non- verbal messages you give to the other person while listening to them is very important to prove that you are paying attention and serious about the concerns being raised or problems being shared. Verbal acknowledgements include phrases such as “Uh -huh, oh really., Yes I see or that's really interesting” while you are listening.

4) Take Notes:

It's important to take notes when you listen others. The most important thing while taking notes is that you must focus on emotions and feelings more than what is being said. It shall help you understand unspoken words or something which is not said but is important part of the conversation. It helps you to connect the dots between the lines.

5) User Door Openers:

While listening to the other person, it makes sense to offer a statement or two to encourage the other person continue speaking. Such encouragements to continue and to carry-on

are called door openers. Examples – “Please go on. “or “Tell me more” or “interesting” etc

6) Ask Questions:

It's important to ask questions while listening. Please consider the following important points:

- a) Ask Open ended questions
- b) It shall open the door for you to get inside the other person and connect better
- c) Asking question really helps in EMOTIONAL CONNECT

7) Be Genuine:

This is basic rule. If you are not authentic and are not genuinely concerned, you would not be able to connect. The other person will soon realize and get to know that you are not serious.

8) Reflective Response:

Reflective response is repeating what the other person said and then asking him/her to confirm. This is the important proof to the other person that you are not only listening but have also understood completely. You can do this by saying something like “What I hear you saying is” And then repeat the essence of what another person has said and seek a confirmation from him/her.

9) Be Generous:

Listening requires the leaders to invest more time than usual with teams and making conscious efforts to reach out to them.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the power of listening cannot be underestimated in the modern corporate landscape. Effective listening has the potential to strengthen businesses, foster genuine relationships, and lead to a happier, more understanding society. It is imperative for educational institutions to recognize the importance of listening as a life skill and include it in their curriculum. By doing so, we can work towards a world where people truly listen to understand one another, ushering in positive change and a brighter future for all.

Author Profile

The author is a corporate leadership trainer and coach. He is author of Amazon no 1 bestseller “The Winning Leader” He has vast experience of leading people in India and abroad during his 34 years tenure with some of the key multinational players in the banking sector. He has done his Master of Philosophy in commerce and recently completed his master's in leadership science from the University of Mumbai. Currently, he is pursuing his doctorate degree in the field of Leadership.