



LISTEN UP!

Communication for leaders...

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A great leader has the capacity and capability to execute powerful conversations. However, conveying the territory, building relationships and producing results are all directly tied to his or her ability to communicate.

Let's say, for example, your risk management advisor helped you realize certain procedures are being ignored, exposing employees to possible harm and your company to risk. Your goal is clear: to gain adherence to proven safety procedures that mitigate risk. A meeting is scheduled with those involved, and success depends on how well you communicate.

Organizational problems most often occur in the handoffs. These happen when conversations are weak, misunderstood or take place in an atmosphere of distrust. Under those circumstances breakdowns in communication are common and there is a very good chance that injuries will occur, projects will be incomplete, wrong or not on time, and customers suffer.

Are you a great listener?

When leaders understand how to communicate effectively, there are positive results in performance. Communication is one of the most important skills in life, and the interesting thing is that the most important part of communication is listening, not talking. And when we listen – which

is different than hearing – more than we talk, we create trust. When you have a conversation with someone who trusts you, they are open and they are listening.

When an atmosphere of trust and empathy exists in organizations, the listening skills of leadership are well known. The impact on an organization can be seen and felt because people are exponentially more motivated to work hard and comply with standards when they believe they are listened to. This atmosphere also results in an energized work force, which customers will see and feel.

Humility and communication

Humility is vital to communication and is a requirement of great leadership. Should a leader be willing to listen to an employee with the objective of learning? Absolutely! You can immediately tell how open and willing an executive is to learning. Yes, some try to fake caring and listening, but it's usually very transparent. We know when someone is tuned out when we are speaking; it usually leaves us frustrated and hurt. If we can tell when we are not being listened to, others can tell when we are not *really* listening to them.

So, which affects performance: Getting it right or being right? If you surveyed others around you in the workplace, which would they say was truer of your style? You might also ask yourself how willing are others to

approach you with ideas or feedback? When a project does not get completed on time you might ask others: What could I have done to help you get this project done on time? What could I do differently? Most people need help figuring out how they can improve performance and advance their careers. That includes everyone in the company, including leadership.

Jim Collins, author of the book *Good to Great...*, speaks of a Level 5 Leadership formula: Humility + Will = Level 5. Humility allows a leader to take responsibility for their contribution to a problem. When communication breakdowns occur and the employee dropped the handoff, a great leader will ask what their own contribution was to creating the situation. Granted, sometimes it truly is the employee's fault alone, but awareness of our own willingness to be accountable is what makes a leader a great leader.

Effective leadership requires influencing – not commanding or directing people. And influence occurs in part through powerful conversation. Powerful conversations require clarity, authenticity, and alignment around actions and issues. Listening and humility are what make it possible.

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