

SHOW ME A GREAT LEADER AND I'LL SHOW YOU A GREAT LISTENER

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Sandy's morning begins as usually. She arrives at work; it's 8:30 a.m. While gently swiping her employee ID, Sandy greets the security guards with a smile and heads off to her office. Sandy notices something different as she casually walks past the large conference room doors - faces sitting in these early morning meetings are gazed over. Few people seem to be speaking and most appear bored. Sandy wonders who would be leading such a disengaged session. How can a group of grown adults, working towards the same goal, project such an unsuccessful image?

Who is ultimately responsible for making a positive impact – our managers? Or , our employees?

Listening provides the basic springboard for the preparation of all leaders, as preparation sets the table for initial insight and growth. With preparation, productive listening leaders build a rock-solid listening and leadership foundation that becomes the anchor for all personal and professional decisions and activities.

Responsibility relies on not just managers, but ALL employees. Managers must be able to understand the benefits of listening and provide opportunities to building solid listening foundations. The initial step in building, advancing, or refining your foundation of leadership values and competencies begins with the development of your personal definition of leadership. If you cannot, or have not, defined leadership for yourself, you will be unable to see it, find it, do it, measure it, enhance it, teach it, or live and repeat it.

Adding these measures to the following leadership facts will clarify your definition of leadership. Facts about listening can be surprising. Many of them contradict conventional ideas about the listening process, but the following five facts are vital to establishing your personal foundation for practical application and listening growth:

Listening Fact 1: Listening is our primary communication activity.

More than half-a-century of research in the field of listening proves beyond a doubt that we spend 80 percent of our waking hours communicating. At least 45 percent of that time is spent listening. For leaders, who average 57 percent, the total time invested in listening is even higher. Numerous studies confirm that listening is identified as the most critical leadership success skill, and is consistently rated by employers as one of the top five skills they expect employees to have. More to the point, as leaders advance in their level of responsibility, the importance of listening increases dramatically. In short, listening is central to the personal and professional success of all leaders, at all levels, and in all endeavors.

Listening Fact 2: Listening is an innate, learned, and improvable behavior.

Listening activities are driven by a combination of instinctive, inherent, and innate forces, as well as a combination of learned skills and behaviors. Listening in its full complexity is a measurable, observable, testable, and improvable behavior. Tests clearly reveal most individuals do not listen well. Immediately after listening to a 10 minute presentation, the average listener has heard, correctly understood, properly evaluated, stored, and appropriately responded to approximately half of what was said. Within 48 hours, that drops to a final effectiveness level of 25 percent. However, there is overwhelming evidence that, with systematic, focused and directed effort, listening effectiveness can be improved. This fact has been demonstrated in thousands of listening courses and seminars, workshops and training programs throughout the world. Like other innate and learned behavior, listening can be improved through an individual's conscious and planned effort. As a result of guided effort, hundreds of thousands of listening leaders have enhanced their awareness and attitude, increased their knowledge, and, advanced their listening skills.

Listening Fact 3: Poor listening is costly. Effective listening is rewarding.

Although listening is central to all leaders' success, few have been trained. The lack of training and attention results in the development of counter-productive and costly listening habits and ineffective behaviors. The costs of poor leadership listening are staggering. Specifically, ineffective and inefficient listening results in extraordinary loss of time, money, productivity, profitability, sales, customer service, self-esteem, reputations, opportunities, and more. On the other hand, effective, efficient, and productive listeners profit in a multitude of ways.

Listening Fact 4: Responsible and active listeners are productive listeners.

Unfortunately, most leaders operate on the assumption that it's the speaker's responsibility to ensure successful communication. As leaders assume the primary responsibility of successful communication rests with the sender, they become passive listeners. Our experience clearly demonstrates that the irresponsible, inactive, passive listener is always a poor listener and an ineffective leader. Poor listeners are lazy, uninvolved, detached, and wait for the speaker to assume responsibility. In fact, they often blame the sender of message for any breakdown of communication. On the other hand, outstanding leaders assume responsibility for the success of all of their communication. When listening, these leaders display an attitude of responsibility, and exhibit concrete behaviors of productive and involved activity. The impact is always positive, profitable, and measurable.

Listening Fact 5: Listening can be commanded only to the degree developed.

Many listeners deceive themselves with the inaccurate and harmful assumption that they can listen well whenever they really need to, want to, or, have to. The misleading assumption that you can "turn good listening on at will," is both grossly wrong and counter-productive. First, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, listeners can only "will" themselves to listen to the level they have developed. Second, the assumption that you can do more than you can actually do, interferes with the investment necessary to focus, grow, and get better. Productive listeners clearly understand their strengths and limitations, and constantly strive to improve and achieve higher levels of performance.

Like the development of your personal definition of leadership, the next step in building, advancing, or refining your personal listening insights, values, and competencies lies in the development of your individual definition of listening. Our collective experience is clear. If you have not defined, or can not define, listening for yourself, you will be unable to: see it, find it, do it, measure it, enhance it, teach it, or live and repeat it.

Bottom line, highly effective listening leaders clearly understand that listening and leading are inseparable. Moreover, highly effective listening leaders understand, value, and engage four levels of listening leadership. The four distinct levels of listening leadership that must be mastered and practiced include:

1. First: Listening to and leading your self.
2. Second: Listening to and leading others.
3. Third: Teaching and engaging other listening leaders.
4. Fourth: Teaching others how to teach and engage other listening leaders.

