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LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE: LISTENING FOR LEADERS

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Listening is one of the most critical communication skills for leaders. Good listeners communicate respect for other people. They show themselves to be open-minded and receptive. They collect good ideas from a variety of sources before they make a decision, and they develop strong relationships with people who contribute to their success. Learning to listen can be easy. The suggestions below give you a place to start.

DEVELOP THE INTENTION TO LISTEN

Many people don't listen well because they never intend to in the first place. Instead, they form ideas in their mind while another person is speaking. They may simply wait for their turn to speak, not paying attention whatsoever to the ideas coming their way, or tune others out and focus on something else entirely. Setting the sincere intention to listen will markedly improve your skill.

AVOID DISTRACTIONS

The biggest error listeners make is looking away when others speak. That includes checking email, skimming the headlines, or even perusing a menu. The posture of listening, like the mindset of listening, is open and respectful. Make direct (but not intimidating) eye contact with others and face people squarely.

PRACTICE THE SKILLS OF GOOD LISTENING

1. Repeat back to people what they share with you. Don't assume you've heard them correctly.
2. Express an awareness of others' emotions. Just saying, "I can see you're upset," or "Wow, you're sure excited about something!" demonstrates you're listening and connecting with what people are saying to you.

3. Respond appropriately. Avoid launching into a story of your own. Ask a thoughtful question, make a comment that furthers the discussion, or simply encourage the speaker to go on.

AVOID UNPRODUCTIVE COMMENTS

Repeatedly mumbling “uh-huh, uh-huh,” telling people what you’re thinking, and giving them advice (unless they’ve asked for it) are all turn-offs for speakers. – Just listen.

REMEMBER THE VALUE OF SILENCE

Slow down. You will automatically become a better listener.

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE LISTENING FOR

The nature of an interaction can differ depending on its purpose. Get a sense of whether you’re listening for emotion (e.g. if someone is coming to you because they’re upset), facts (e.g. if you’re trying to understand a situation), or a way to help (e.g. if someone needs something from you). You can discover the purpose of any conversation by simply asking yourself, “What does this person want?”

Listening well takes effort but the effects on your leadership can be limitless.



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