

Five Listening Mistakes that Impact Relationships

Enlightened Leaders know how to listen. This skill alone has the power to transform any relationship. In your professional life, listening is at the heart of effective leadership, and in your personal life, listening is an act of love.

There are many signs that indicate you need to improve your listening skills. Here are five mistakes and ideas for improvement.

1. Multi-tasking
2. Interrupting
3. Giving advice too soon
4. Discounting
5. Stage hogging

Multi-tasking

The Problem: When someone is talking to you and you are multi-tasking, you slip in and out of the conversation. The risk is that you only catch pieces and bits of the conversation. You risk pretending to listen and if the person talking to you needs your attention, you have just missed the nuances and inflections that help you offer valuable feedback or support.

The Solution: When someone is boring you or wasting your time with chatter, it's easy to slip into activity to maximize your use of time; however it's more authentic to simply end the conversation than to pretend to listen. However, when a friend or colleague really needs your attention but you don't have time, you can tell them that you need to schedule a time when you can give full attention. Either way, you have remained authentic and present.

Interrupting

The problem: If you are a fast thinker it will be very difficult to stay quiet when someone takes a long time searching for the right word, or fumbles around with a lot of um's ah's and long pauses. When someone is talking and you interrupt to add your two cents, you will frustrate the other person. They are concerned about finishing what they are saying; therefore what you say won't register with them anyway.

The solution: Put your tongue on the top of your mouth and breathe. If you are sitting at a desk or table, (or on the phone) you might want to jot down a thought so you don't forget what you were going to say. Another solution is to apologize immediately and invite them to finish their last sentence.

Giving advice too soon

The problem: When someone complains, it's normal to go straight to a solution; however, most people do not really want advice, especially when they are in the midst of deep emotion. In the beginning it is never really about the solution. It is about calming down the emotional energy so that a solution can be found.

The solution: Validate and acknowledge. This does not mean that you agree with what is being said. For example: "It sounds like you are really angry and you are tired of the way things are going..." Wait for them to agree or clarify, without encouraging them to go into a long story. If they are angry with you, do not defend. Seek to understand before debating your point.

Discounting

The problem: Someone comes to you with a little mole hill of a problem but they act like it's a mountain. You will make the mole hill grow even bigger if you say, "Oh, don't worry about it, "or "It's really not a big deal."

The solution: Look for facts. You can simply say, "I want to understand more." Then encourage them to give you the facts instead of just the feelings. Re-direct if they start complaining or going into stories. Another question: "Is that the truth, or just how you feel?"

Stage Hogging

The problem: You don't even know you are doing it. You talk fast and you talk a lot. Talking is how you work things out and how you sort out all of your creative ideas. You know so much about your product that you can't understand why it isn't as interesting to everyone else. This is the very worst listening mistake especially if you are a leader, a coach, a consultant or sales professional. Others will absolutely feel drained by your hyper activity and massive energy.

The solution: Pay attention to how much you talk and how much you listen. The old saying is true, "when I talk I know what I know, but when I listen, I know what I know and I know what you know." Let the other person talk first. Make sure to draw others in with questions and curiosity. Avoid the tendency to add one more comment or observation to every thing they say.

Use the matrix below to help you identify and become aware of your own patterns of listening and see where you can improve.

Problem	Solution	Observations/Ideas/Actions
Multi-tasking	End the Conversation Schedule specific time to talk Sit in a place free from distractions	
Interrupting	Keep tongue on roof of mouth Breathe Apologize	
Giving Advice	Acknowledge Validate their feelings	
Discounting	Seek the facts Validate Acknowledge	
Stage Hogging	Keep track of how much time you talk Let them talk first Ask questions Be curious	