

Insight *Leading & Managing Change*



Register Now
for the November 9-12
LEAD Institute for
High Potential Managers

2009 Program Dates
(Ann Arbor, MI)
March 16 - 19
July 20 - 23
Nov 9 - 12

[Click here to:](#)

[Download a PDF of the LEAD brochure](#)

[Download a PDF of this article](#)

[Get More Information](#)

[Register On-line](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Consulting Services:
[Leadership, Team & Organizational Development](#)

Over 35 Years
Consulting Service
Excellence

I Need To Listen Better*

No doubt about it. Everyone needs to become better at listening when others are speaking. Most everyone we work with in our **LEAD Program for High Potential Managers** and those leaders we engage in a coaching process list listening as a major area for improvement. In preparing for a keynote presentation for a National Institute of Standards and Technology conference on leadership I came across the following practical list of things we all can do better in the area of listening.

Below is an overview to help you improve your listening skills one step at a time.

Step One: Stop talking. When you do speak, refrain from adding too much value. What does “adding too much value” mean? It means keep your comments short. Don’t give numerous or lengthy examples to explain what you mean. Most people understand what you are saying without examples. If they ask for an example, give them one. When you are in a meeting work at not being the first one to talk. Wait a bit, be patient someone other than you will talk.

Step Two: Stop what you are doing and look at the person who is talking. It is just plain rude to work on your computer, check your Blackberry for messages and to continue to do the countless other thing you need to get done while someone is talking. Even if you are in a meeting, look at the person who is talking it makes them feel valued. Now, do something when you are looking at the person who is speaking. Acknowledge what the person is saying by nodding, smiling or uttering something like “uh-huh”. Doing these things lets the person speaking know that two-day communication is taking place, they are talking and you are listening.

Step Three: Pay attention so you are sure that you can restate, or summarize, what the person just said. Before you begin to speak you might say, “ Okay, I think I get it. Is this what you mean. . . .?” If they acknowledge that it is, then it is your turn to talk. If they say no, it was not what they meant, then ask them to clarify.

Step Four: This is a hard one. Try to tune into what the person is feeling. Try to sense the emotions, or lack there of, behind the words. You might say something like, “I get a sense that you are very angry about all this.” Or, “Am I correct in thinking that this does not make a bit of difference to you one way or the other.” Now, the hardest part of all is to tune into your own feelings. You might say something like, “ What you have just explained makes me feel relieved to know we are on the right track.” Tuning into your feelings and the feelings of the other person is called showing empathy.

Step Five: Let the person know what action you’ll take if you agree with them, or ask the person if there is anything you need to do. If you don’t agree say so and let the person know why. Silence is not golden. Taking either of these actions will surely let the person know you have been listening.

Source: Zenger, J. H., Folkman, J.R. and Edinger, S. K. The Inspiring Leader., McGraw Hill, 2009.