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### How to Really Listen to Others

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- Be sure you can hear the speaker. It is surprising how often people do not really listen to others. It is just as surprising how often people do not realize that they cannot even hear others. So always make this your first guideline in any situation for effective listening.
- Overall, attempt to listen 75 percent of time – speak 25 percent of time. This is one of the most powerful guidelines. Use of the guideline depends on your situation. For example, if you are making a presentation, you will speak more. Otherwise, ensure that the other person speaks more than you do – and listen to them.
- Adopt a culturally compatible physical posture to show you are interested. This can be a powerful means to show others that you are interested in hearing them. For example, you might lean forward and maintain eye contact. Whatever physical gestures you make, be sure they are compatible with the speaker's culture.
- Do not think about what to say while you are also trying to listen to the speaker. Your brain moves four times faster than a speaker's voice. Thus, your brain can easily leave the speaker behind. Instead, trust that you will know how to respond to the speaker when the speaker is done.
- Notice the other's speaking style. Different people have different speaking styles. Do they speak loud or soft? Slow or fast? Are there disconnects between what they say versus what their body language conveys? Some people convey the central idea first and then support it with additional

information. Other people provide information to lead the listener to the same conclusion as the speaker.

- Listen for the central ideas, not for all the facts. Experienced leaders develop a sense for noticing the most important information conveyed by their people. They hear the main themes and ideas from their colleagues. If you notice the major ideas, then often the facts “come along” with those ideas.
- Let the speaker finish each major point that he or she wants to make. Do not interrupt, but offer your response when the speaker is done. If you have to interrupt, ensure you are still hearing the other person. Interrupt tactfully. For example, put up your hand and say, “Might I interrupt to ask you to clarify something?”
- Reflect back and ask if you are hearing accurately. This is also one of the most powerful guidelines. Start by asking if you can reflect back, or summarize, to the other person after he or she has spoken. Then progress to where you can ask the person to summarize back to you what you have just said to him or her.
- Regularly share indications that you are listening. Those indications can be, for example, nodding your head, saying, “yes” to short points with which you agree.
- Learn the art of supportive questioning. Coaching involves the use of powerful questions to understand yours and others’ perceptions, assumptions and conclusions. The coach must practice effective questioning skills to truly understand others.
- Ask others to share feedback about your communication skills. Often, people do not know what they do not know about themselves. One example is the leader who prizes him or herself on strong listening skills, yet regularly interrupts others when they are speaking. Another is the leader who speaks only in conclusions, but does not share how he or she came to those conclusions so others do not understand the leader’s rationale.

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