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Gentle Ears Makes For Good Management

Studies have shown that regarding communication activities, humans use listening skills (45%) more than talking (30%) reading (16%) and writing (9%). So why does it seem that everyone talks so much!!!!? Since our brain moves four times faster than our mouth the urge is to talk to attempt to keep up with the internal activity. So temporarily stifling our brain waves to listen requires a considerable amount of self control.

In management, mastery of listening skills can turn a mediocre manager into a good one and a good manager into a great one. I suggest it's because people remember how they feel after they talk with us. And if they feel happy, complete, validated, appreciated, excited, or gratified chances are it's because they've been listened to. And when your employees, customers and suppliers feel like they've been heard they're going to want to keep working with and for you.

Following are some thoughts on practicing gentle ears:

- **Stay in the moment.** This means to give your full attention to the speaker. Stop the mind from wondering where it will go. Keep

your hands on the desk (not on the keyboard or a writing pad). Observe body language. In fact, stay so focused on the person that their message is all that exists at that moment.

- **Tune into the rhythm.** Did you ever notice that with certain people, the conversational rhythm doesn't feel right- you're starting sentences simultaneously, speaking before the other is finished, interrupting, creating awkward pauses, etc? The more you listen the more you can get into the flow of the other speaker's conversational style and minimize these hiccups.
- **Refrain from preparing a response.** While the other person is speaking is not the time to formulate a response. Having totally absorbed everything said, respond only when the speaker is through. You may be surprised at how articulate you sound after you've fully assimilated the entire impact of the conversation.
- **Assume nothing.** This means clarify everything you don't fully understand. This can be done by saying- "What I'm hearing you say is...." or "Are you saying that..." or "I'm not sure what you mean, would you repeat that?"
- **Ask.** I was involved in a situation once where an employee was very frustrated about a confrontation she got involved in. She clearly had erred in judgment but remained



*Where Listening
and Learning Embrace*

very combative about it. After meeting with her supervisor she was still upset and wanted to see me. After listening to her, I couldn't understand what she was after because she had admitted she was wrong so I finally asked- "Tell me, what do you want?" Well, I could see that was the question she was waiting for by the relief expressed in her face and voice. All she wanted was to have her side of the story documented and placed in her file. I hand wrote it on the spot, put it in her file and that was the end of it. She wanted to be heard and I had stumbled across the key to doing that- simply by asking.

- **Empathize.** Sometimes getting into another's skin can help you better understand where they're coming from. How are they seeing it? Would you see it the same way if you were in their place? Empathy will help you see the points being made.
- **Acknowledge feelings.** I once went to a boss because I was frustrated at how I was being treated. I felt my contributions were being ignored. I don't know if I articulated it well but I do know that my boss never said- "I see you're upset, what I can do to help? or "Tell me why you're frustrated." Any acknowledgement would have gone a long way with me.

Feelings permeate our lives. So why would we deny them in the workplace? Let's be manager

enough to acknowledge and deal with them in a caring way.

I don't think it's a coincidence that I became a better manager (and father and husband) when I began to shut up and listen. But like breaking up, listening is hard to do and I've got not one but two ears (plus some major brain rewiring) to make gentle!

Steve Wyrostek, President
Gentle Ears, Inc.
541 N. 5th Ave.
Des Plaines, IL 60016
Direct: 847-803-6991
FAX: 847-299-8070
steve@gentleears.com
<http://www.gentleears.com>