

LISTENING episode//part 1

LEADER ▶ FEEDER



Communication is arguably the **most important skill** for success in the workplace (and life). Additionally, the quality of workplace relationships are in large part determined by the quality of communication exchanges. In these exchanges, there are **speakers** and there are **listeners**, and we don't learn much (if anything) while we are speaking. Therefore, **learning to listen** is essential for **workplace functioning, relationship health, and personal learning.**



““ When it comes to describing much of what currently passes for personal communication, the analogy of the crocodile is an apt one: all mouth and no ears. ””

-Laurence Endersen

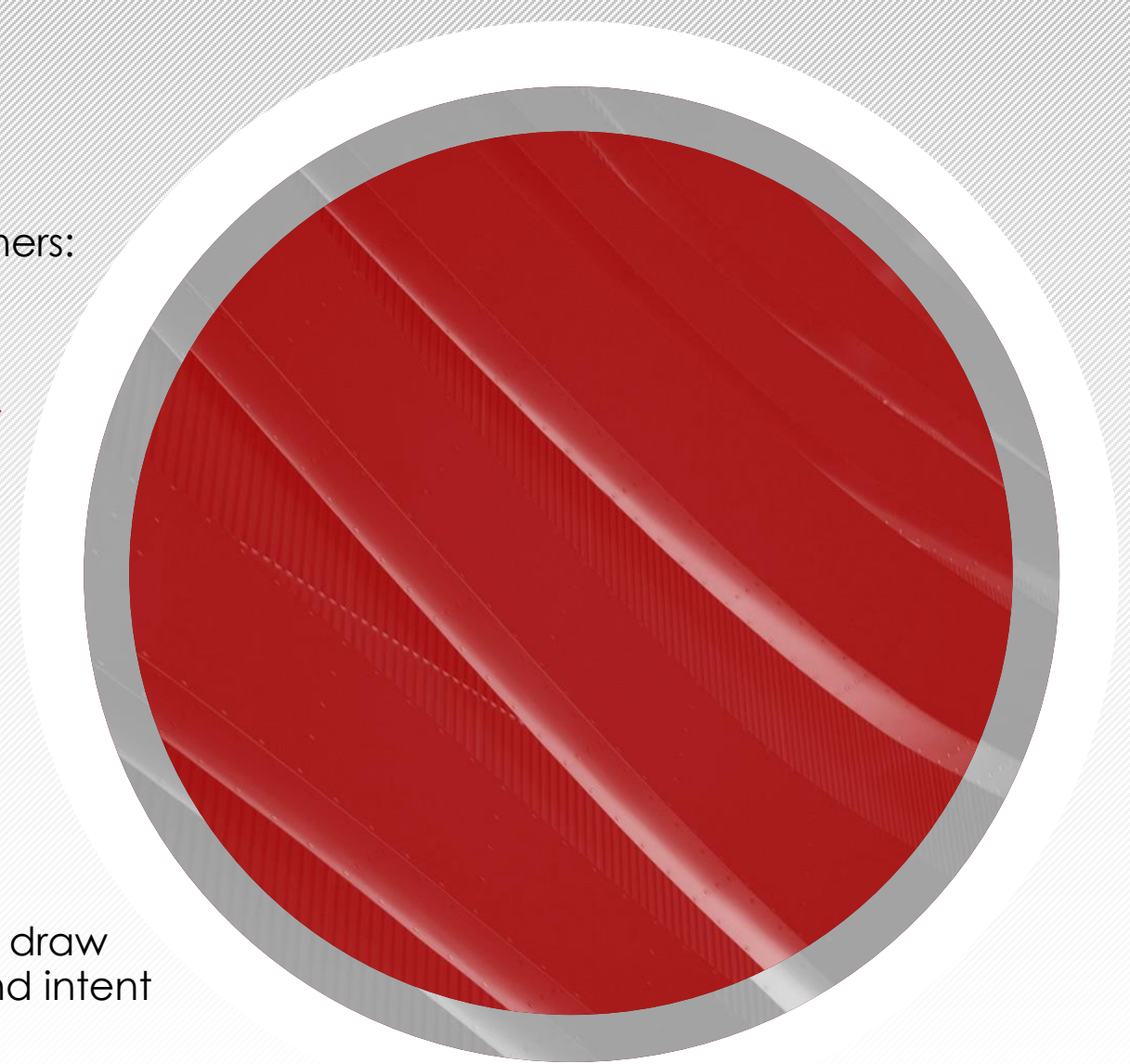


The **PROBLEMS**

- Listening (like any skill) requires training, yet many people don't actively acquire the knowledge nor practice the skill to the degree necessary for success and improvement.
- When communicating, we often dialogue mostly in answers— competing answers — to be right, defend oneself, or problem solve and/or we listen with the intent of having something ready to say as soon as the speaker is finished, rather than listening to learn or understand.
- Poor usage and/or development within one or more of the three components of listening (i.e., comprehension, retention, or responding) lowers effectiveness.
- Information must pass through our eyes, ears and other sensory organs before being processed by our brain; therefore, we receive information through the (often times) default, faulty, and incomplete “lenses” we are wearing.

BARRIERS to LISTENING:

1. The following **COMPREHENSION BARRIERS** can create discrepancies in how we communicate and engage others:
 - Language barriers
 - Use of slang, jargon, and other idiosyncrasies
 - Individual differences such as age, cultural background, and social exposures
2. The following **RETENTION BARRIERS** require suppressing one's ego long enough to truly hear and understand what's being said before responding:
 - Cognitive biases and selective listening
 - Internal or external distractions (e.g., fatigue or noise)
 - Memory issues
 - Ego or status protection
3. The following **RESPONSE BARRIERS** relies on being able to draw on a rich, accurate picture of the speaker's emotions and intent to productively move the communication forward:
 - Low emotional intelligence
 - Time constraints
 - Failure to comprehend and/or retain what the speaker has conveyed



When **leaders** engage in active and effective **listening** with their **team members** it can lead to:

- Team members feeling honored that their leader invested a genuine interest in understanding their position or perspective.
- Team members are psychologically and emotionally validated and satisfied.
- Team members feel as if their opinion matters and contributes in significant ways to the leader, team, organization, and mission.





LISTENING episode // part 2
COMING SOON!

Part 2 will include **strategies and tools** to become a more effective **listener** to *strengthen interpersonal relationships, increase team functioning, and expand your individual skillset.*

THANK YOU!



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As outlined in part 1, effective **listening** provides **critical benefits** to the **speaker**, **listener**, and **beyond to the workplace environment**. As the **listener**, **learning to understand** the **humanity** behind the words of the speaker can summon the speaker's and listener's best selves. Read on for **practical listening strategies** and **tools** to deliberately introduce into your **daily practices** and target in your **communication exchanges**.



The **STRATEGIES** an Overview

1. Set the stage
2. Align all aspects of communication
3. Respond with curiosity and questions, not answers
4. Keep the exchange about the speaker
5. Adopt a “they’re right” mindset

STRATEGY #1:

Set the stage

We cannot give 100% of our attention to multiple tasks at any given time. Rather, we can only quickly switch between tasks. During communication exchanges, prioritize setting the stage where you only have one task at hand (i.e., listening), thereby giving the speaker your time and full attention.

To TRY—

1. Remove distractions

- Turn off (or put on silent) all phones, computers, smart watches, and anything that makes noise or desires your attention
- Remove/stow away technology and other attention-grabbing items from your line of sight
- Close office door(s) or find a spot whereby interruptions won't/can't happen or will be minimized

2. Match the speaker

If the speaker sits, you also sit. If the speaker stands, you stand. Turn your chair and/or body to face the speaker. Physical cues matter to prime your brain of what is about to happen, and lets the speaker know you are ready to engage.

3. Ask to reschedule

If for whatever reason(s) you cannot allocate your full time or attention to the speaker, request to find a better time.

Example

“This conversation sounds important, and I want you to be truly heard and understood. However, in this moment, I don't believe I can give you my full time and attention in order for that to happen. If this matter isn't urgent, can we find a better time later today or this week to revisit this conversation?”

Communication is complicated enough; therefore, aligning aspects of communication such as word choice, degree of specificity, and nonverbal behaviors can simplify communication and increase exchange effectiveness.

To TRY—

1. Ask the speaker to remove jargon, slang, and idiosyncrasies

Asking the speaker to remove unnecessary and unshared language can help you listen more intently at the message behind the words versus getting caught up in the words themselves.

2. Ask the speaker for the fine details and the big picture

Asking for a range of information that includes both a zoomed-in approach (i.e., myopic, detailed, sequential) and a zoomed-out approach (i.e., macro, overarching, thematic) can help you listen with confidence that you are receiving well-rounded information.

Example “Can you please explain your plan starting with the first step and taking me through to the final step so that I can better understand the proposed sequence and timeline? Can you also provide me with a bird's-eye-view of where this plan fits in with the department's vision and mission?”

3. Respect communication norms and differences

Taking cues from the speaker on how to engage verbally and nonverbally during communication exchanges may send the message that you respect and value background and cultural differences.

STRATEGY #2:

Align all aspects of communication

Curiosity and questions are the means by which we explore ourselves, other people, and the world around us. Staying curious and asking questions means you are willing to be surprised, let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. In other words, curiosity and questions means being vulnerable.

To TRY—

STRATEGY #3:

Respond with **curiosity**
and questions,
not answers

1. Avoid responding immediately

Allow the person time to finish speaking and flush out their ideas fully. If necessary, provide a considered response that meets their needs (e.g., support, compassion, exploration, etc.), not your wants (e.g., to be right, give advice, end the conversation, etc.)

2. Ask questions that invite honesty, dignity, and revelation

Strong, effective questions should result in the speaker having to engage in personal reflection and disclosure, not defend themselves or debate.

Example

NOT EFFECTIVE: “You’re scared?”

EFFECTIVE: “Are there any fears or concerns present that might hold you back or get in your way from doing what you feel is right?”

3. Invite searching

During the communication exchange, find places where a new or alternative point of view is presented and tie it back to what is at stake in human terms for everyone.

Example

“I would love to hear your perspective on...and how would this bring the team together?”

“I’m curious to know more about what you’re thinking...and how might this change/impact your personal progress?”

“That’s interesting, can you tell me more on...and what does this mean for your wellbeing?”

Keeping a communication exchange focused on the speaker and their needs throughout the entire conversation can be difficult. In an individualistic society, it's easy to train ourselves to always turn conversations and the attention back to us and prioritize how things relate and matter to our lives above all else.

To TRY—

1. Make the learning lens your default setting

Attempting to learn at least *one* new thing during communication exchanges should be your ultimate goal and desire, not aiming for agreement or comfort.

2. Make the speaker the star

Look for ways to bring out the best in the speaker by helping the speaker have their views properly heard and understood.

Example “Your views on accountability are unique and shows how you have contributed in your role! I’m excited to hear and learn more about how you drew the conclusions you did in this area.”

3. Choose quality over quantity

Emphasizing quality of word choice, questions asked, psychological safety experienced and depth shared over the number of words used, time spent, and/or topics covered can be far more rewarding and fruitful for ensuring the speaker receives the attention they deserve and are seeking.

STRATEGY #4:

Keep the exchange
about the speaker

Adopting a mindset that prioritizes the “rightness” of the speaker requires great humility and agility to work around your own preconceived notions, assumptions, and ego.

To TRY—

1. Listen with the intent to agree

Imagining that what the other person is saying overlaps (or agrees) with something you believe is a quick way to get new, alternative ideas into your brain without fueling defensiveness.

2. Find the truth being spoken

The speaker may not be 100% true, but there is some deeper truth of what’s being said. Challenge yourself to find the deeper truth, rather than waste time finding error in the details that has the potential to spark debate or argument.

3. Use, “Yes, and...”

Attempt to never use the word no. Instead, use the technique of saying “Yes, and...”, which provides the baseline that the speaker is right and you are adding to their truth.

Example Speaker: “We are lacking true accountability on the team.”

Listener: “**Yes**, accountability could improve on the team **and** if you’re willing to share, I would love to hear your views on what true accountability would look like for me, you, and the team alike.”

STRATEGY #5:

Adopt a “they’re right”
mindset

MOMENTUM episode // part 1
COMING SOON!

Individual contributors are often **rated by their leaders** on their “**potential.**” What if this way of assessing team members is both **flawed** and **dehumanizing**? Find a **better way** to **assess** and **develop** your team members through their **momentum.**

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