

Servant Leadership Focus is a monthly newsletter to promote and stimulate servant leadership ideas and tools into the Viox culture.



TRANSFORMATIONAL STORIES

Daniel Harkavy, Leadership Coach

Questions have a power all their own, and the best way to show others that we care about them is to truly listen to what they say. Most of us have reached our places of leadership as a result of the advice we give, the direction we provide, and the decisions we make. So many of us, whether we own our companies or lead a department, have relied heavily on our ability to communicate in an instructional way, a very one-sided process. We'll observe a situation; think through all of the aspects of the problem, crisis, or opportunity, then inform our team members what each one needs to do, specifically.

The coaching leader must possess not only the instructional skill set, but also the active listening and powerful questioning skill set. If coaches limit themselves

to telling others how they did it, they're staying in the teacher or mentor role instead of moving into the coach role.

A coach attempts to draw out the meaning behind a team member's words, to understand the motive or the intent behind the spoken sentences. Active listening is all about asking questions that cause the player to peel back the onion, to get to the heart of performance issues, or to reveal limiting beliefs. These powerful questions, asked in many ways, will help you to best understand what's going on in the head and heart of your teammate. And after you ask these powerful questions, you acknowledge what your teammate is saying in response—that's active listening.

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GOOD MANAGERS ARE GOOD LISTENERS

JUDITH GLASER

Did the speaker's emotional tone bother you? Were you evaluating his effectiveness as a communicator? Or were you so preoccupied with your own problems that you didn't listen at all or only heard a little of what was said? Still another question: What guided your listening? Individuals who hear the same speech often walk away with different impressions of what they heard.

We hear one-seventh as fast as we think. While our mind has the time to listen, evidence suggests that we don't always use that time well. Traditionally, ineffective listening has been viewed as a hearing problem. However, as we gain important new information about the effects of this uniquely human process called listening on the effectiveness of an organization, we can recognize that ineffective listening is much more. Consider some of these common types of listening behavior in business.

“Noise in the Attic” Listening. Like many people, some of us think that being a good listener is merely sitting silently while others talk. Outwardly, we appear to be listening. Inwardly, however, our mind is elsewhere or we are making judgments about earlier comments. We end up preoccupied with our own internalizations.

“Face Value” Listening. Sometimes, we think we are hearing facts when actually the words we're hearing are our interpretations of situations or figures. This explains why executives, managers and staff sometimes differ dramatically in what they think they hear. Interpretations are influenced by our experiences. The more experiences we have the more we should be able to interpret what we hear from the speaker's perspective. Unfortunately, many adults hear only what they want to hear.

“Position” Listening. We interpret the messages we hear by our position in the organization or concerns as a member of the organization. Employees, for instance, are constantly alert for clues to how their performance is

being rated, reading their own interpretations into messages. A manager might listen to her president's annual report to determine whether her division will be financed to grow further. What she hears in that talk could easily affect her performance during the year as well as her relationships with co-workers.

Precision Listening. This is the style of listening that can make us better executives. It accepts that listening is not an end in itself but a part of a chain of processes that ends in a decision, strategy or change in behavior or viewpoint. When driving to some place new, we think nothing of stopping at a gas station for a map so we can navigate in unfamiliar territory. We need the map to drive efficiently and with less chance of an accident. If we get lost, we need only refer back to the map to find our way. Listening can be approached the same way.

In business, executives need to focus on the interpersonal influencing process. *Who is being influenced to move him from Point A to Point B and why? Where is this conversation going? To what ideas, beliefs and behaviors is this person most committed in his life? Which of these ideas, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors need to be influenced for the person to be more effective on the job? What do I know about this individual that will help me better understand her and what is being said? Are her problems or concerns such that we can effect real changes, or are they out of reach in the business context?*

The executive examines the way he or she answers the employee to see how these answers affect the listening process. Will the employee listen better if the answers are short and sweet (“yes” or “no”) or will listening improve if these statements contain more background information? What kind of information will be helpful? *In practicing precision listening, the executive listens carefully to the employee's answers—to phrasing, context and words used to get clues to the real meanings behind the words.*

Critical Skills for the
Servant Leader

By Michael J. Stabile

- Asking questions instead of giving answers:** By asking such questions as “What do you think we should do?” or “How do you suggest we proceed?” you take a step behind another person.
- Providing opportunities for others to lead you:** This goes beyond the traditional notion of looking for growth opportunities for other people.
- Doing real work in support of others instead of only the reverse:** Rolling up your sleeves and contributing “sweat equity” to the efforts and outcomes of other people earns you their appreciation as someone upon whom they can depend, regardless of the relative hierarchical or functional position each of you holds.
- Seeking common understanding instead of consensus:** Leaders who know when and how to follow build deep common understanding, not superficial consensus, around the purpose, goals, and approach at hand.

Coaching reminders:

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Managers often complain about how they have to constantly solve their people’s problems-sometimes I sense it is the manager more addicted to this than the staff. Giving people an answer does little but continue their dependence on you. When people use statements like: “What do you think I should...”, “I’m not sure what to ...”, “I really want to ... but I’m not ...”, these are statements that people want help with their thinking. When you start to listen for these phrases you might notice these dialogues are happening constantly between management and their staff, and between peers, right across your organization.

Here’s a marker that points to situations when a self-directed approach is going to be useful: *any time you feel yourself about to give advice, or about to tell a person what you would do, or wanting to share your experience or opinion. If it seems appropriate to do this, it’s generally going to be appropriate to use a self-directed approach.*

APPROACH 1: Help Someone Make New Connections on the Spot. The first priority is always to help people come up with their own answer by making new connections themselves.

APPROACH 2: Help Someone Make New Connections Later. Sometimes people can’t find an answer to their dilemma on the spot. In this instance, help them work out how to find the answer themselves later on, rather than just give them your answer. If you tried a self-directed approach and Paul said: “I’m not sure how to move ahead with this.”

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE & LEADERSHIP JENIFER M. GEORGE

Research linking positive moods to creativity suggests that when leaders are in positive moods they may be more creative (Isen et al., 1987) and, hence, more likely to come up with a compelling vision that contrasts with existing conditions. For example, people in positive moods have been found to be more integrative, use broader categories, and approach problems and categorization more flexibly (Isen & Baron, 1991; Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990).

Creating a compelling vision for an organization can be an exercise in creativity, positive thinking, and flexibility and such an exercise will be facilitated by positive moods (Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990). **Leaders who are high on emotional intelligence will be better able to take advantage of and use their positive moods and emotions to envision major improvements in their organizations’ functioning.** Leaders high on emotional intelligence also are likely to have knowledge about the fact that their positive moods may cause them to be overly optimistic. Hence, in order to ensure that they are being realistic and appropriately critical, they may be more likely to revisit their judgments when in a more neutral or negative mood to ensure a careful consideration of all the issues involved. Such leaders also are likely to be better able to repair negative moods arising from any number of sources that may limit flexibility and creativity, and, more generally, use meta-mood processes to manage their moods and emotions in functional ways (Mayer et al., 1991).

Importantly, leaders need not only to come up with a compelling vision, but also to effectively communicate it throughout the organization in such a way that it does come to be shared and is ‘collective’. By accurately appraising how their followers currently feel, relying on

In this case you might say, “So what would you need to do? For example, who would you need to talk to, so that you knew what to do next?” In this instance you are empowering people to come up with their own answers.

APPROACH 3: If Neither of These Approaches Is Possible, Provide an Answer in a Way That’s Most Useful to the Person’s Thinking. Sometimes you have specific information the other person needs, such as a piece of data or inside knowledge of a system. If you’re not 100 percent sure you have the right answer, you might pose your idea as just a possibility. If you are clear you have specific information someone needs, you can still use a self-directed approach, by seeing how someone wants the information presented.

The self-directed approach is a way of thinking, not just a technique. It’s a commitment to helping the other person do as much of the thinking as possible, according to the way their wiring is set up. It’s about putting the other person’s brain in the driver’s seat. Of course, there are times when a directive style is more appropriate as a leader. Firing people and life-or-death emergencies need a different approach. However, in general day-to-day work, **if you want to improve people’s performance, make it your job to help them think better, rather than think for them. Sounds simple enough, yet this is a long way from the approach that happens in most workplaces.**

their knowledge of emotions to understand why they feel this way, and influencing followers’ emotions so that they are receptive to and supportive of the leader’s goals or objectives for the organization and proposed ways to achieve them, leaders may help to ensure that their vision is shared or collective. For example, a leader who is high on emotional intelligence may act on emotional knowledge which suggests that followers are more likely to experience positive emotions and be supportive of the leader’s goals and objectives when the leader expresses confidence in followers and serves to elevate their levels of self-efficacy (Gardner & Avolio, 1998).

In order to instill in others an appreciation of the importance of work activities, leaders need to ensure that followers are aware of problems and major issues facing an organization as well as potential opportunities while at the same time raising their confidence in their own abilities to successfully overcome problems, meet challenges, and seize opportunities. Leaders need to understand and influence followers’ emotions such that they are aware of the serious nature of problems yet, given the leader’s vision, are enthusiastic about resolving the problems and feel optimistic about personal contributions. *Leaders who are high on emotional intelligence are more knowledgeable of, and adept at managing, emotions in these subtle kinds of ways.* Moreover, they are more likely to intuitively possess and act on meta-mood regulation knowledge such as the fact that people feel better when gains or positive events are presented in terms of improvements over previous conditions (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Salovey et al., 1993).