

Career and Life Tip Subcommittee
Communications and Publications Committee

Junior Officer Advisory Group

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Tip of the Quarter July 2023 – Leadership: Importance of Listening

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Effective listening goes beyond just hearing. You hear with your ears, but you listen with your whole body. Our ears, eyes, heart, and brain pick up on body language, non-verbal cues, tone, and feelings. Research shows that listening effectively allows you to gather more information, increase trust, decrease conflict, understand what motivates others and inspire commitment in those with whom you are working or leading. Effective listening demonstrates genuine care and concern for others and fosters cohesive bonds among coworkers and subordinates.

Communication consists of four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Listening is rarely taught, often misunderstood, and perhaps the most important of these skills. The ability to listen effectively is an important component to building positive relationships. Positive relationships are a critical aspect of leadership.

Listening effectively allows the leader to focus on the person doing the work as well as the task. Focusing on the person increases the likelihood of inspiring and motivating that person and increasing their commitment and dedication.

“The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.” ~Ralph Nichols, ‘The Father of Listening’

Effective listening:

- Lets others know that you are interested in them and care about them. When people feel cared about, they are better followers.
- Allows you to learn what is important to others.
- Promotes empathy.
- Transmits respect.
- Builds trust.
- Leads to personal awareness and growth.

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” ~Winston Churchill

Consider the following ways to improve listening skills:

- Pay attention to emotions, body language, and tone of voice versus listening just to spoken words.
- Be aware of cultural cues conveyed in communication.
- Ask others if you are a good listener. Focus on their recommendations for improving your listening skills.
- Think about understanding others—seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Try not to work on formulating a response or rebuttal before someone is finished sharing their message.
- Be attentive! Do not multitask when someone is speaking to you—look at the person speaking so you can see beyond their words.
- Stop talking—take time to listen. Consider this...LISTEN and SILENT share the same six letters.

“To say that a person feels listened to means a lot more than just their ideas get heard. It’s a sign of respect. It makes people feel valued.” ~Deborah Tannen, Georgetown University

References:

- <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/listening-to-improve-leadership/>
- <http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/skills/listening.htm>
- <https://teaching.uchicago.edu/resources/teaching-strategies/characteristics-of-effective-listening/>