

Great leaders are great listeners, and therefore my message today is a simple one – talk less and listen more. The best leaders are proactive, strategic, and intuitive listeners. They recognize knowledge and wisdom are not gained by talking, but by listening.

Take a moment and reflect back on any great leader who comes to mind...you'll find they are very adept at reading between the lines. They have the uncanny ability to understand what is not said, witnessed, or heard. In today's post I'll quickly examine the merits of developing your listening skills. Warning: this post isn't going to coddle you and leave you feeling warm and fuzzy – it is rather blunt and to the point.

Want to become a better leader? Stop talking and start listening. Being a leader should not be viewed as a license to increase the volume of rhetoric. Rather astute leaders know there is far more to be gained by surrendering the floor than by dominating it. In this age of instant communication everyone seems to be in such a rush to communicate what's on their mind, they fail to realize the value of everything that can be gleaned from the minds of others. Show me a leader who doesn't recognize the value of listening to others and I'll show you a train-wreck in the making.

In other posts I've pointed out it is simply not possible to be a great leader without being a great communicator. This partially accounts for why we don't encounter great leadership more often. The big miss for most leaders is they fail to understand the purpose of communication is not to message, but to engage – THIS REQUIRES LISTENING. Don't be fooled into thinking being

heard is more important than hearing. The first rule in communication is to seek understanding before seeking to be understood. Communication is not a one way street. I've interviewed and worked with some of the most noted leaders of our time, and to the one, they never miss an opportunity to listen. In fact, they aggressively seek out new and better ways to listen.

Simply broadcasting your message ad nauseum will not have the same result as engaging in meaningful conversation, but this assumes you understand the greatest form of discourse takes place within a conversation, and not a lecture or a monologue. When you reach the point in your life where the light bulb goes off, and you begin to understand knowledge is not gained by flapping your lips, but by removing your ear wax, you have taken the first step to becoming a skilled communicator. A key point for all leaders to consider is that it's impossible to stick your foot in your mouth when it's closed. Think about it...when was the last time you viewed a negative soundbite of a CEO who was engaged in active listening?

The next step in the process is learning where to apply your new found listening skills. Listen to your customers, competitors, your peers, your subordinates, and to those who care about you. Ask people how you can become a better leader and then LISTEN. Take your listening skills online, and don't just push out Tweets and Facebook messages, but ask questions and elicit feedback. Use your vast array of social media platforms, toolsets and connections to listen. If you follow this advice not only will you become better informed, but you'll also become more popular with those whom you interact with.

Have you ever walked into an important meeting and wondered who the smartest person in the room was? If you mull this over for a moment you'll find the smartest person in the room is not the one doing all the talking – it's the person doing all the listening. You'll also notice that when intelligent people do speak-up, it's not to ramble-on incoherently or incessantly, but usually to ask a question so they can elicit even more information. The quiet confidence of true leaders has much greater resolve than the bombastic displays of the arrogant.

Following are 6 tips for becoming a better listener:

1. It's not about you: Stop worrying about what you're going to say and focus on what's being said. Don't listen to have your opinions validated or your ego stroked, listen to be challenged and to learn something new. You're not always right, so stop pretending you know everything and humble yourself to others. If you desire to be listened to, then give others the courtesy of listening to them.

2. You should never be too busy to listen: Anyone can add value to your world if you're willing to listen. How many times have you dismissed someone because of their station or title when what you should have done was listen? Wisdom doesn't just come from peers and those above you – it can come from anywhere at anytime, but only if you're willing to listen. Expand your sphere of influence and learn from those with different perspectives and experiences – you'll be glad you did.

3. Listen to non-verbals: People say as much (if not more) with their actions, inactions, body language, facial expressions, etc., as they do with their verbal communications. Don't be lulled into thinking because someone isn't saying something they're not communicating. In fact, most people won't overtly verbalize opposition or disagreement, but they will almost always deliver a very clear message with their non-verbals.

4. Listen for opportunity: Intuitive listeners are looking for the story behind the message, and the opportunity beyond the issue. Listening is about discovery, and discovery can not only impact the present, but it can also influence the future. Opportunities rarely come from talking, but they quite frequently come from observing and listening.

5. Let listening be your calling card: One of the best compliments you can be paid is to be known as a good listener. Being recognized in this fashion will open doors, surface opportunities, and take you places talking never could. Listening demonstrates that you respect others, and is the first step in building trust and rapport.

6. Recognize the contributions of others: One of the most often overlooked aspects of listening is thanking others for their contributions. If you glean benefits from listening to someone, thank them. Even if no value is perceived, thank them for their time and input. Never forget to acknowledge those who contribute energy, ideas, actions or results. Few things go as far in building good will as recognizing others.

Allow me to leave you with one final thought to reflect on – if you're ready for advanced listening skills, don't just listen to those who agree with you, but actively seek out dissenting opinions and thoughts. Listen to those that confront you, challenge you, stretch you, and develop you. True wisdom doesn't see opposition, it sees only opportunity. I believe it was Benjamin Franklin who said, "Speak little, do much."

In my opinion great talkers are a dime a dozen, but great listeners are a rare commodity. What say you?

Fuente: [www.innovationexcellence.com](http://www.innovationexcellence.com) by Mike Myatt