

## The 8 Steps to Active Listening

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By David Grossman

Leaders inspire their teams by showing they care. One of the most important ways leader communicators show they care is to listen—truly listen—to what people have to say. (There's a reason we have two ears and one mouth.)

When leaders make an effort to listen to employees, they see in the benefits in terms of engagement and positive relationships, which move an organization toward success.

It's not only about inviting employee input. It's also about proving you value that input by taking action on it.

To create a culture where people feel their input is valued, you need to facilitate dialogue. Leaders must set the tone, establish expectations for the entire organization, and model active listening.

### The eight steps to becoming an active listener:

- 1. Approach each dialogue** with the goal to learn something. Think of the person as someone who can teach you.
- 2. Stop talking and focus closely on the speaker.** Suppress the urge to think about what you're going to say next or to multitask.
- 3. Open and guide the conversation** with broad, open-ended questions such as "what other strategic alternatives did you consider" or "how do you envision..." Avoid close-ended questions that can be answered with just a "yes" or "no."
- 4. Drill down to the details** by asking directive, specific questions that focus the conversation, such as "Tell me more about...", "How did you come to this conclusion?" or "How would this work?"
- 5. Summarize what you hear and ask questions to check your understanding**, such as "If I'm understanding you..." or "Tell me if this is what you're saying...."
- 6. Encourage with positive feedback.** If you can see that a speaker has some trouble expressing a point or lacks confidence, encourage him or her with a smile, a nod or a positive question to show your interest.
- 7. Listen for total meaning.** Understand that in addition to what is being said, the real message may be non-verbal or emotional. Checking body language is one way to seek true understanding.
- 8. Pay attention to your responses.** Remember that the way you respond to a question also is part of the dialogue. Keep an open mind and show respect for the other person's point of view even if you disagree with it.

***How will these tips help encourage dialogue in your culture?***

*inspiring possibilities*