1) ACTIVE LISTENING IN 4 STEPS: THE BEST LEADERS MAKE THE BEST LISTENERS

Leaders spend a good part of their workday listening to other people. But bear in mind, there's a big difference between "passive" and "active" listening.

Managers are too busy thinking about their response rather than listening to the team member's complete statement. This lack of attention can result in costly mistakes in a business setting, wasted time, poor service, and leadership failure.

By listening fully and in a way that shows understanding and respect for the speaker, you develop a rapport and build trust. That's the true foundation from which you can lead and influence others.

Effective listeners use a four-step process to ensure understanding:

1. **Listen to the total message**

   If you hear only bits of what is said, you may draw the wrong conclusions.

   So, before you begin to frame your response, listen to everything the person has to say and give 100% of your attention. Find the main thought the person is trying to share and consider it from the presenter's perspective, not yours.

   Prove that you care by suspending all other activities. Don't flip through papers or keep checking your watch.

2. **Prove your understanding by using nonverbal signals**

   Let the person know that you're paying attention through your nonverbal cues. Doing so sets a comfortable level for the conversation and encourages the other person to keep talking. It also demonstrates that you're interested in the topic and paying attention.

   - Some positive nonverbal signals:
   - Moving from behind the desk
   - Maintaining eye contact
   - Leaning forward slightly
   - Raising your eyebrows when the speaker makes a significant point
   - Nodding to indicate agreement

3. **Use open-ended probes**

   These are questions that allow the other person to respond at length, rather than with just a "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions begin with words like "why," "how," "explain," and "describe."

   By asking these types of questions, you'll encourage the other person to share their opinions and feelings and elicit additional information.

   Be aware of how many open-ended questions you ask. Then consciously try to increase the number.

   You'll find that the quality of your communication improves dramatically.

4. **Paraphrase what you hear**

   To say "I understand" isn't enough. People typically need some sort of evidence of your understanding.

   In addition to nonverbal cues and questions, prove your understanding by briefly restating the information you've just heard or by asking a question that proves you know the main idea.

   You don't do this to prove that you were listening to the person, but proving that you understand them. There's a big difference.

FIVE bad habits to guard against, to be an effective listener, you must pay keen attention to the speaker. It seems like common sense, but too often, we don't walk the talk. As leaders, it's important to model this behavior for team members and teach by example.

To check your effectiveness, take the following listening quiz to make sure you're not guilty of these bad habits:

1. Are you constantly trying to jump in, finishing people's sentences when they pause too long?
2. Do you step on people's sentences by talking before they've finished speaking?
3. Do you fail to make eye contact with people who talk to you or give them verbal cues that you're listening (e.g., head nod)?
4. Do you often say "Yeah" or "Uh-huh" while others speak?
5. Do you often make the same point someone else just made, or ask a question that's just been answered?

2) MOTIVATING TEAM MEMBERS THROUGH REALISTIC DEADLINES: 4 DO'S AND DON'TS

Without deadlines, team members flounder. They can't be aware of the urgency or priorities of a project unless their supervisors tell them.

Following are four tips on motivating team members by setting realistic deadlines:

1. **Do be specific.**

   Name the target day and time. And mean what you say. If you ask for completion "next week," don't complain on Friday that you needed it on Wednesday.

   If you say, "By the end of the month," be sure that 5 p.m. on the afternoon of the 31st is acceptable.

   By contrast, if you wanted the project completed by 9 a.m. on the 31st so you could present it to your boss that afternoon, say so. Otherwise, you won't meet your boss's deadline.

2. **Do clarify priorities**

   Let people know if this assignment takes precedence over any other projects they're working on now. Avoid the old, favorite deadline "ASAP," which usually translates in an team member's mind as "whenever it gets done."

   What does ASAP mean? Drop everything and work overtime, or first finish up what you're already doing?

   Even worse: Never tell team members to work on something "when you get a chance." If you do, don't be surprised if it never happens

3. **Don't set false deadlines**

   Setting a deadline earlier than necessary (because you don't trust your team members to meet the actual deadline) creates more problems than it solves.

   Your staff will soon learn how you operate and assume there's always air in the schedule. As a result, they'll always miss that first deadline, just as you knew they would.

   Nor should you claim that a project is a rush job that just came up when, in fact, you've sat on it for a few days. People have a way of finding out the truth.

   Also, being dishonest about deadlines can hurt you later when a project truly is a rush job. Your staff may not believe you and won't make the extra effort to get it done on time.

   One caveat: If you have a new team member, you may want to allow extra time in the schedule for revisions. Let the team member know that you're building review time into the schedule.

4. **Do establish an updated schedule**

   The best-laid plans can go astray, and so can deadlines. You'll minimize the chance of this occurring by setting up a progress report schedule when you assign the project. This is especially important for long-term projects.

   When you make the assignment, discuss how you and the team member will communicate about their progress. Do you want the person to stop by your office once a week and give you a quick status report? Send you a daily email? Update the status at the monthly staff meeting?

   The schedule should be reasonable and convenient for both of you. It should make sense in terms of the length and complexity of the job and the team member's competence and experience. Whatever you decide, now's the time to set the schedule.

3) MOTIVATING TEAM MEMBERS TO DO THEIR BEST EACH DAY: 6 OFFICE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

A leader's job is 100 times easier and more rewarding when the team and all team members perform like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a leader's job becomes exponentially more challenging.

Here are six tips for keeping team members on task and working together toward the common goal.

1. **Clarify, clarify, clarify**

   It's hard to get things done when people don't understand their roles, responsibilities, or precisely what's expected of them.

   Too often, supervisors assume their team members understand what needs to be done. Or, they fear they'll insult an team member's intelligence by stating what seems obvious to them.

   Don't underestimate the importance of making sure that everyone is on the same page. Clearly communicating roles and duties is never a wasted effort.

2. **Establish clear expectations**

   Goals are an essential part of clarifying. They help team members focus on what's important and provide incentives to find more efficient ways to get work done.

   The only way to improve the way you're doing things is to set clear, measurable goals and constantly monitor your success in those areas.

3. **Don't micro lead your entrepreneurial-minded team members. But do monitor them**

   Entrepreneurial-minded team members, those who take the initiative and do an adequate job without much direction from leaders, are often great team members.

   But just because you feel like you can let them loose with a project doesn't mean they don't need lead. In fact, when you empower team members in this way, monitoring becomes even more critical. You may be concerned they'll think you're micromanaging them. Don't be. When done right, monitoring doesn't have to feel like micromanaging. Use these check-ins as an opportunity to recognize effective behavior and get their feedback.

4. **Encourage team members to share bad news with you**

   How? Don't shoot the messenger!

   If there's a problem, mistake, or delay, team members may be hesitant to inform you. They may fear your reaction or think they'll look incompetent. That's why it's essential to react correctly to bad news. Strive to be constructive, not punishing. Express appreciation for the accurate information, no matter how negative it may be. Respond quickly to the problem with specific actions.

5. **Solve problems quickly, but not too quickly**

   Don't waste time when dealing with threats or problems. But be aware that jumping to solutions too quickly can end up causing more headaches.

   Smart leaders know when additional information or analysis is essential and only delay action without adding value. Before taking action, leaders should always use a systematic, logical analysis to identify the cause of a problem.

6. **Encourage informal and spontaneous interaction**

   Your team members' informal relationships are crucial to getting things done. The ability to connect with a colleague "in the moment" when you have a problem or new information is vital for effective execution.

   But in today's high-tech world, it can be challenging to make these connections. Don't let coworkers in departments go days just emailing back and forth. Facilitate informal gatherings to brainstorm and hash out problems face to face.

4) MANAGING TEAM MEMBER RETENTION: LISTEN FOR SUBTLE WHISPERS OF TEAM MEMBER TURNOVER

Most good team members don't stand up one day and quit out of the blue. They send off subtle hints that, if you're listening, you can act on before the excellent team member walks out the door. That's why it's essential to listen to statements like these that can act as an "advance warning system" for team member turnover:

- "This job isn't what I thought it would be**.''** Rather than exploring what the team member was initially told or trying to defend miscommunication, focus on the present. Ask, "How do you want your job to be?"
- "I'm at a plateau. I can't grow here.**''** Consider that a plea for job stimulation. Provide the team member with new responsibilities, cross-training opportunities, or exposure to influential mentors.
- "I don't get any feedback." Most team members crave regular input from their supervisors. Please don't leave them in the dark. Plan regular sessions to discuss ongoing projects and performance.
- "This place has too much politics." While you may not be able to eliminate all dissension and politics in the organization, you can level with the team member. If someone makes this complaint, address rumors head-on, and don't play favorites.

Plug holes in morale with three questions: to discover potentially severe threats to morale, periodically ask team members the following three questions. Then, use their answers to assess whether they're disgruntled or dedicated.

1. "If you knew what you know now, would you have taken this job? Why or why not?"
2. "In an ideal world, how would your job change over the next year?"
3. "What is your favorite part of the job?"

5) MAINTAINING WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY: 7 COMMON TEAM MEMBER GRIPES (AND HOW TO SILENCE THEM)

A study says that 40% of leaders in the United States are considered "bad bosses" (because they are managers). Yet, most leaders assume that their relationships with their team members are running smoothly.

Obviously, some of those bosses are wrong … and that can create significant problems for a business. A Gallup Poll says organizations are 50% less productive—and 44% less profitable when serious boss-team member conflicts exist.

According to the book 30 Reasons, Team members Hate Their Managers, (realy reason, they are not leaders), some common team member complaints about management, plus ways managers can silence them, include:

1. **"My boss doesn't respect me."**

   Get to know your team members as people.

   Treat them as adults and respect their privacy.

   Recognize that team members have lives outside work and try to accommodate those needs.

2. **"Nobody appreciates my hard work."**

   Provide regular feedback and recognition.

   Mix an equal number of "thank-you's" and "good job" with your critiques. Ask team members for their ideas, and then use them.

   Thank and reward team members while they're in the act of performing well; don't wait for their next review.

3. **"There are different rules for different people."**

   Focus on being fair and consistent with the workload, pay, perks and appreciation.

   Be aware of the legal risks of making work decisions based on race, age, gender, religion, or disability status.

4. **"My performance reviews are useless."**

   Provide continuous feedback. Nothing in the review should come as a surprise.

   Involve team members in setting goals and adapt a development mindset.

   Focus on specific team member behaviors (and cite documented examples). Don't criticize the person's character traits.

   Conduct reviews on time.

5. **"My boss micro leads my work."**

   Realize that team members are not happy when they can't make decisions. Delegate when possible.

   Allow team members to have more say in how they do their work.

6. **"We have too many meetings."**

   Institute a time limit on meetings.

   Use a meeting facilitator.

7. **"I hate coming to work."**

   Ask team members what precisely would improve their outlook. Try to meet them at least halfway.

   Consider how you can enrich jobs (or juggle tasks among team members) to make them more motivated.

What makes a good boss? Qualities that US workers consider necessary for being a good boss (in order of importance), according to a Yahoo! survey:

1. Communication/listening skills
2. Effective leadership skills
3. Trust in their team members to do their jobs well
4. Flexibility and understanding
5. Intelligence
6. Teamwork skills
7. Even temperament

6) TEAM MEMBER RETENTION STRATEGIES: 8 LITTLE THINGS LEADERS CAN DO TO RETAIN THE BEST

When good team members leave for greener pastures, it makes a leader's job much more difficult. Leaders can prevent this syndrome by doing what they can to make their own pasture the greenest.

While compensation helps, it's not always cash that makes pastures greener. When salaries are equal to the marketplace, other factors take priority.

Here are eight easy-to-plant "seeds" that help keep team members growing and content, according to a KEYGroup report:

Keep them engaged. Bored team members are neither happy nor productive. To keep your team members engaged and satisfied, present them with challenging assignments and opportunities to grow and develop. Consider ways to provide opportunities for team members to improve on their skills or learn new skills they can use in their jobs.

Give praise where praise is due. If someone does a great job, let the person know. It's that simple, and then let their coworkers know. Then let everyone know! Recognizing a job well done isn't an expensive proposition, but it will mean the world to your team member.

Be aware of team members' changing needs. As your team members progress in life, their needs change. After having a child, an team member may want to travel less. As your baby boomer team members get older, so do their parents. They may need to take time off to care for the health needs of their mom or dad. By recognizing these changing needs, you show sensitivity to what's going on in their lives. This builds loyalty and helps bring stability to their personal lives, which means they can focus better at work.

Realize that great team members thrive under great leaders. Team members won't leave for greener pastures unless you drive them. The buck starts and stops with their leaders. Team members of great leaders will go to the ends of the earth to do a good job for them. The flip side is that team members with poor leadership will simply go.

Conduct regular "stay" interviews. Rather than exit interviews, use regular "stay" interviews to provide an opportunity to compliment high performers on their work and inspire them to do more. Use these interviews to gauge how well you are meeting team members' needs. Seek out their suggestions on what you and the company can do to improve.

Create an environment where people can do their best work. By allowing team members to develop and implement their own ideas, you'll keep them passionate about their work. Make sure they have the right tools and equipment they need. Nothing frustrates team members more than not having everything they need to get their jobs done.

Create an environment of trust. Team members are happier and work harder when they trust their leaders. They decide which leaders they can trust based on how their fellow team members, company vendors, and customers are treated. As a leader, it's essential to ask yourself: Do I treat people at work with respect? Do I behave ethically and hold others accountable for their actions? When an team member sees their leader treating someone poorly, whether it's a vendor or a fellow team member, the team member's level of trust in the whole company diminishes, and they care less about doing a good job. In addition, remember that trust is a two-way street. Your team members need to feel that you trust them as well.

Rid your pasture of weeds. The weeds are those poor performers and negative team members who stifle their coworkers' good attitudes and high performance. If you're not pulling out your weeds, they'll choke out your best performers. Obtain consistent feedback and keep good documentation so you can sort out team members. The bottom line: Striving to keep team members happy and engaged is not just a "nice" thing to do. It's the only way to create a successful business. And it's not just a matter of trying to retain people to avoid the high cost of recruitment. Engaged team members are creative, productive, motivated, and brimming with good ideas. Not only will they stay, but they'll be fully committed to their jobs, to you, and to the company's success.

The bottom line: Striving to keep team members happy and engaged is not just a "nice" thing to do. It's the only way to maximize workplace productivity.

Thoughtful team member retention strategies are helpful not just for retaining people to avoid the high cost of recruitment. Engaged team members are creative, productive, motivated, and brimming with good ideas.

7) CONFRONTING POOR PERFORMERS: 6 TIPS FOR LEADERS

No leader enjoys having "the talk" with team members. But ignoring a team member's poor performance won't make the problem go away; it will only make things worse.

If you're apt to take the head-in-the-sand approach to team members' job failings, you're not alone: Only 31% of US workers agree with the statement "My leader confronts poor performance," according to a KEYGroup survey.

And companies that tolerate poor performance will drive away top performers who are unhappy working in such an environment.

Leaders approach workers about their performance problems in a caring, fair, problem-solving manner. When you tactfully confront such people, you'll find that one of two things happens: They improve, or they move.

1. Be specific

Suppose a team member has been consistently late. Specify the number of times or amount of time. Avoid exaggerations, such as " You are totally unreliable." Instead, say, "This is the third time in one week that you have been at least 10 minutes late."

If this issue has been a problem in the past, remind the team member when you have pointed out the offense previously. Say, "I indicated to you last Tuesday that coming in late is not acceptable."

2. Focus on business reasons

Continually refocus the team member on the stated business reason for your comments. Example: "It's important for you to be here at the designated time since customers rely on our immediate responsiveness when they have questions about their order."

If you need to correct something like inappropriate casual dress, reiterate the company guidelines. Don't comment on the team member's personal tastes.

Straying into areas that have nothing to do with workplace performance will result in a loss of credibility with that person. Stay focused on the team member's job performance and how it affects the company.

3. Give timely feedback

An everyday manager's mistake is to bombard team members with feedback at their appraisal but remains mostly quiet during the rest of the year. The appraisal should be a review of the discussions held during the year. Nothing mentioned at that time should come as a surprise to the team member.

Leaders know that's it's vital to provide all team members with positive and negative feedback consistently.

Poor performers require more feedback, not less. Make them aware of what they did wrong immediately.

One caveat: Don't try to give corrective feedback when the person is upset or emotional. Wait until the team member has calmed down.

4. Consider team member's personality

Everyone handles feedback differently. Some people want it straight, while others are more sensitive. With a team member who wants straightforward feedback, you can get away with saying, "You gave the customer the wrong information because you didn't have the updated manual. How do you think we should handle it?"

To get through to a more sensitive team member, take a different approach. For instance, "I understand why you provided the customer with this information. Are you aware that the guidelines have changed? What do you suggest we do in this situation?"

Regardless of the person's personality, be clear and straightforward in your communication.

5. Check for understanding

Avoid asking close-ended questions during the discussion or when summarizing. At the end of a confrontation, don't ask, "Do you understand?" The team member could simply say "Yes."

Instead, ask the team member to summarize their understanding of the situation. Have the person layout actions, steps, or accountabilities that were discussed.

6. Keep a paper trail of discussions

Good documentation, such as a performance log for each team member, allows you to identify and prove recurring problems easily. (This could also help if the team member decides to sue.)

After each meeting with the poor performer, take notes that summarize the discussions. Include the problem, the action taken to correct or eliminate it, the dates, the result that occurred, and any comments that will help you recall feedback sessions when you complete the performance appraisal.

Don't let the performance log become a little black book of mistakes and errors. Also include examples of acceptable or outstanding performance

8) HELPING TEAM MEMBERS ACCEPT CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE 4 C'S

New project. New boss. New goals. New office. Team members are constantly facing changes to their work environment.

Leaders who can understand the impact of those changes on their team members and can help them through those unsteady times will earn their team members' trust and loyalty.

To start, you must first understand why people are so quick to resist change. By knowing this, you can make intelligent decisions about how to introduce changes

The initial response is often negative. People seem to instantly scan new changes for any factors that aren't to their benefit. Then they complain about it. This negative focus often blocks their awareness of positive aspects.

Also, when team members do welcome changes, initial optimism is sometimes followed by a period of regret (the "buyer remorse" phenomenon). The bottom line: Expect adverse reactions and plan accordingly.

Change equals loss. One main reason for the negativity: When things change, you lose something. You may gain something as well, but a loss is usually involved.

For example, team members may win promotions but also lose the comfort of their previous jobs.

Acceptance requires planning

If you want team members to accept change, invest some time in planning and communication. Managers just throw a change out there and expect others to say, "Well, that's just fine." That's not likely.

To get people to accept change, the first step a leader takes is to understand what, from team members' perspective, they feel that they're losing. If you can empathize with their feelings and possibly compensate for the loss, you've taken a giant first step toward acceptance.

Here are four more factors, the four C's, to promoting acceptance of change:

1. Caring. Listening and responding to people's reactions is just as important as explaining the reasons for change.

2. Control. People want input into how the change will be implemented. But never ask for input unless you plan to consider it.

3. Choice. Team members feel better if they are given options as part of the change process. The more choices they have, the more they feel in control.

4. Competence. Workers are happier about change if they feel they have the skills and abilities to succeed after the change. The faster you can help someone move through the learning curve, the faster they will accept the change.

So, before you begin to implement any important change with team members, take time to develop a plan that incorporates those four features.

9) 15 QUESTIONS TO ASK TEAM MEMBERS IN THEIR FIRST 60 DAYS

Recruiting, hiring, and training new team members can eat up a leader's time. The last thing a leader wants to do is restart the process all over again because that new hire just stood up and walked out the door after three months.

To avoid repeating that time-consuming process, it's essential to talk with new team members soon after they arrive to uncover potential problems that can cause turnover.

Mangers make the common mistake of waiting until an employee's performance or behavior shows problems before talking with them. By then, however, it can be too late. The team member is halfway out the door.

Leaders make it a point to meet with new hires within the first 60 days. Your goal: Discover their likes/dislikes about the job and environment, see if the job meets their expectations, and nip potential problems in the bud.

View these one-on-one chats as a continuation of new-team member orientation and a way to gain fresh insight into your department and the organization. Start the meeting by reminding new team members that you're glad they're part of the team and that you value their input and observations.

Then, ask some of the following questions, adapting them to your own needs:

1. Why do you think we selected you as a team member?
2. What do you like about the job and the organization?
3. What's been going well? What are the highlights of your experiences so far? Why?
4. Do you have enough, too much, or too little time to do your work?
5. How do you see your job relating to the organization's mission?
6. What do you need to learn to improve? What can the organization do to help you become more successful in your job? (Don't ask these two questions unless you are prepared to follow up with action. Otherwise, you can build false expectations, and that can cause disappointment.)
7. Tell me what you don't understand about your job and about our organization.
8. Compare the organization to what we explained it would be like.
9. Which coworkers have been helpful since you arrived? (Goal: Pinpoint which team members can be influential in retaining the new hire.)
10. Whom do you talk to when you have questions about work? Do you feel comfortable asking?
11. Does your supervisor clearly explain what the organization expects of you?
12. How does it go when your supervisor offers constructive criticism or corrects your work?
13. Do you believe your ideas are valued? Give examples.
14. How well do you get along with coworkers?
15. Have you had any uncomfortable situations or conflicts with supervisors, coworkers, or customers?

Finish the discussion by asking the team member if they have any questions for you or suggestions on how the job can be lead better.

10) BECOMING A BETTER BOSS: 13 STEPS TO SUCCESS

Leaders aren't only responsible for an organization's fiscal assets; they're also responsible for its human assets.

According to an Adecco report, here are 13 simple ideas you can implement today to become a more effective leader:

1. Recognize a job well-done

Everyone likes to know when they've done something well. Make your team members feel important every day. Show enthusiasm for their work.

2. Encourage staff to take risks

Give them enough freedom to take prudent risks. You will find team members at all levels come up with good ideas.

3. Always be honest

Let team members know you trust them and be honest and open in return. Just one deception can destroy your credibility for good. A Gallup Poll found that one in five workers say their bosses don't treat their team members fairly.

4. Offer a challenge

Productivity and enthusiasm significantly decrease with boredom. A survey by the American Productivity & Quality Center found that the best motivator for team members is challenging work. Your challenge is to keep them challenged.

5. Realize that money isn't everything

Studies show that money isn't the only motivator for team members. In fact, most studies show that team members choose factors like recognition for a good job, personal development, and challenging work as being more important than salary. So if you want to keep team members, a pat on the back can be just as effective as additional pay.

6. Be a straight shooter

Don't set foggy goals for your team members. People want to know what you expect of them. Give directions to team members in simple language. Tell them precisely what is involved and why you think they're best for the job.

7. Know when, where to criticize

Inform team members when they perform well and when they don't. Tell them immediately. Don't lump all your complaints into one session. Don't criticize team members in front of others. Highlighting failures in public will discourage innovation by everyone involved, and you will quickly turn colleagues into enemies.

8. Keep communication lines open

Team members crave clear, ongoing, understandable, and unambiguous communication. Don't communicate just in times of trouble. Relay positive news as well. Give team members information before, not after, important events.

9. Make team members feel important

The need to feel needed—everyone has it. One study found that more than half of the team members surveyed felt their leaders failed to make them feel important as individuals. And 77% of those team members also said they were thinking of looking for another job. Allow team members to contribute. Ask for their opinions and advice. Reduce the number of autocratic decisions.

10. Be consistent

Workers can learn to live with any boss if they know what to expect. If you keep them guessing, you will keep them looking … for another job. Inconsistent behavior breeds anger, frustration, dismay, and disappointment.

11. Be impartial

Don't play favorites. Discrimination destroys morale, hurts productivity, and opens the door to lawsuits. Bosses who promote unfairly will quickly lose team members' confidence in them. Treat everyone the same, politely.

12. Take an interest in team members' careers

Coach or counsel team members on how they can climb the corporate ladder. Become a mentor to team members with real potential and fire.

13. Know how to say "no"

There will be plenty of times that you can't be Mr./Ms. Nice Guy. You have to say no. How? Just do it. Explain the reason for your refusal. Avoid making a snap decision unless time constraints force your hand. If possible, tell the team member you will consider the request and decide in a day or two. Take enough time to let the team member know that the request has had a fair hearing.