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**How do I Demonstrate I Am Listening?**

**By Gary B. Cohen**

I have spoken to many leaders and the consensus is that listening to the answer is more important than asking the perfect question. Listening intently builds trust between you and the speaker. With that in mind, here are some tips to improve your listening:

1. Don't let your mind wander. Zen masters can keep their minds completely focused on one thought or conversation, but most of us can not. We might, for instance, latch onto one piece of information that the speaker has said. We grip it tightly and plan our response, rather than simply bookmarking this information and continuing to listen. In doing so, the speaker will see in our eyes that we have tuned out. Trust, confidence, and motivation will spiral downward.
2. Don't interrupt after asking a question. Leaders often have Type-A personalities, so they want to complete others' sentences. In all likelihood, they could probably do a better job of relaying the information, but that is not the goal of listening. Out-thinking your subordinates or showing off is not leadership. Patience is. Allow the speaker all the time in the world to provide you with an answer and to ask follow-up questions. Doctors at the renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota pride themselves on spending a lot of time listening to their patients. Many practitioners ask questions and filter out most of what the patient says (listening only for symptoms they believe to be present), paying little mind to the patients' questions. Those questions can be very revealing especially if the patient is suffering from a rare disorder. Good doctors and good leaders have patience and make better decisions as a result.
3. Don't ask a question then give an answer to see if you were right. I was in a coaching exercise with a CEO. He summoned his accountant and asked her, "What are our revenue and net profits going to be this year?" Before she could answer, he said, "\$5 million and \$1 million respectfully." He clearly wanted to demonstrate that he was aware of the numbers to me and to her. This was about ego and it did nothing to build his leadership within the organization. Each time we do one of our team members' jobs our leadership power is taken away. What's her incentive to try to answer his questions in the future? Wasn't he communicating that her time must not be valuable if she was going to be called into the office just so he could ask and answer his own question? Does she now think he has nothing better to do with his time? Actually, these are not assumptions. This is what I discovered when I spoke with

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her afterward.

4. Be attuned to body language—your own and the speaker's. Maintain eye contact. Sit up straight and lean forward. Don't communicate disinterest or impatience by tapping a pen against the desk. And try to pick up on nonverbal cues that the speaker is transmitting. John Urban, Former CEO, President and Chairman of Pioneer Hi-Bred International looks for "Dissonance." When there is a disagreement or a gap between the work that was performed and the work that was expected to be performed, he pays particular attention to body language—failure to make eye contact, lowered or trailing off voices, etc. He then tries to imagine the question the speaker least wants him to ask. Then he asks it.

Interestingly, John finds it easier to listen for dissonance and ask the right questions if the organization's vision, plan, and goals are clear. It makes sense. After all, if you know what key the symphony is in, it is much easier to detect a wrong note.

If you follow these four tips, you will be a good listener. And you will be pleasantly surprised to find out how prepared your subordinates are for their meeting with you.

Gary received his undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota and attended Harvard Business School. He has participated in Covey Leadership, Disney University, & the Aspen Institute as a Crown fellow.

## **How to Listen to Your Teenager Without Appearing to Have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)**

**By V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed.**

In one of the Family Circus cartoon strips, the little girl looks up at her father, who is reading the newspaper, and says, "Daddy, you have to listen with your eyes as well as your ears." That statement says almost all there is to say about listening. Being a good listener means focusing attention on the message and reviewing the important information.

Listening can be considered an art, as well as a skill, and like other skills, it requires that you exhibit some discipline to be effective. However, in today's world where multitasking is considered essential to surviving in the workplace, it is not uncommon to be talking on the phone while we are reading mail or sending e-mail, and simultaneously conducting hand signals with a co-worker who needs your input about something important.

However, when it comes to communicating with your teenagers, you have to separate yourself from this multitasking communications style, and learn how to focus 100 percent of your time on her when she needs to talk to you. If you do not, she will perceive this distracted behavior as a lack of interest in her.

Thus, during your conversations with your teen, you must ignore your own needs, demonstrate patience, and pay attention to her. Hearing becomes listening only when you pay attention to what is being said, and can contribute to the conversation.

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So how good are your listening skills?

Answer the following "yes or no" statements honestly:

1. I make assumptions about my teens feelings and thoughts
2. I bring up past issues during current disagreements
3. I interrupt my teenager's conversation
4. I respond to a complaint with a complaint
5. I respond to my teen with phrases like, "That's ridiculous."

If you answered "yes" to any of these statements, then there is some room for improvement in your listening skills.

What to do

Use the following guidelines to help improve your listening skills:

1. Maintain eye contact with your teen during conversations. Good eye contact allows you to keep focused and involved in the conversation.
2. Be interested and attentive. Your teen will sense whether you are interested or not by the way you reply or not reply to her.
3. Focus on "what" your teen is saying and not "how" she is saying it. If she is upset, for example, she may be exhibiting body language that may be distracting.
4. Listen patiently and avoid getting emotionally involved in the conversation. If you do so, you will tend to hear what you want to hear, as opposed to what is really being said. Your goal is to remain objective and open-minded during your discussions.
5. Avoid cutting your teenager off while she is speaking. This will show her that you respect her right to have an opinion, as well as to freely express it.
6. Avoid distractions or trying to multitask during your conversations. This may be okay at work, however your teen may perceive that you have a terminal case of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). :)

Exercise

It may be helpful to have a practice conversation with your teenager rather than wait to try and be a better listener when she comes to you with a "real world" problem. Inform her that she is really important to you, and that you want to be a better listener. Then tell her that you need her help.

Referring to the above guidelines, have her tell you about her day while you demonstrate your listening skills. Then ask her how you did and what you could have done better. Remember not to get defensive and conclude by thanking her for her help. Doing this on a regular basis will not only improve your overall listening skills, but also will make your teenager want to talk to you.

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V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed. co-authored "Realizing the Power of Love," How a father and teenage daughter became best friends...and you can too, with his teenage daughter Jennifer S. Santoro. For more information, visit their Web site at <http://www.dads-daughters.com>

V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed. has ten years of experience as an educator. He is also certified in Training and Development with over eighteen years of industry experience. He coauthored, "Realizing the Power of Love," How a father and teenage daughter became best friends...and how you can too, with his teenage daughter Jennifer S. Santoro. For more information visit their Web site: <http://www.dads-daughters.com>

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Improve Your Listening Immediately!

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