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a MESSAGE from SYLVIA

Lead Through Listening



Back in the days when I served as the Executive Director of a fourteen county non-profit organization, I sat in a regularly scheduled meeting with one of my employees who had been on staff for just a short time. After providing the usual update on her job activities, she switched gears and

began to lay out a fresh idea about how we might approach a major event that our organization was in the process of planning. I noticed the sparkle in her eyes as she spoke. Intrigued, I studied her face and leaned further into the conference room table. Without interrupting I let her describe the details she'd mapped out in her mind.

All of a sudden this woman stopped talking. She looked at me with an odd expression which, to be honest, I couldn't accurately interpret in that

moment. For a few seconds both of us were quiet. I didn't know what she was thinking. Then she said: "You know, I can't remember the last time somebody listened to me like this. Especially at work. People are always so busy, worrying about the next thing they must do. In my previous jobs I generally felt unheard, almost ignored. I don't feel like that right now with you. I feel seen and valued, as if what I'm saying really matters."

I never forgot those words. They touched me deeply. In fact, her message--delivered from the heart--stayed with me for over twenty years. Until recently when I decided to focus on the power of listening in the November ezine and realized that THIS was the story I wanted to tell.

You can and will lead through listening. I learned that people will follow you when you pay close attention to them and apply yourself. People will take you seriously when you **take them seriously**. When you truly "hear" them, acknowledge them, honor them...My feature article below gives you cut-to-the-chase strategies for developing the leadership competency of artful listening.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

7 Ways to Develop the Leadership Competency of Listening

Listening is re-emerging as a recognized leadership competency. In my opinion, it never should have taken a back seat. It's too critical for both relationship and business success. Because we are untrained, most folks are poor listeners. Some of us don't want to hear that, but it's true. We may turn our faces in the direction of other people when they are speaking. We may nod our heads occasionally. We may even interject a word or two. But frequently we are not fully present. We are not connected. We're faking. Listening requires engagement. And we're just not there.

Learning and practicing the following seven strategies can help you to develop and boost this leadership competency:

1. Make eye contact.

Eye contact sets the stage for true connection with another person. Just remember to look away every so often to maintain that necessary level of comfort.

2. Focus. Avoid distractions and electronic devices.

Contrary to popular belief, the human brain cannot focus on two or

three things at the exact same time. If you're typing email messages or texting, you won't be listening to the person sitting in front of you.

3. Remain open minded.

It's tough to remain in a neutral space until somebody is finished talking. The natural tendency is to go into an evaluating, judging, deciding mode. What might happen if you simply stayed open to possibility?

4. Observe body language and voice tone.

True listening involves more than hearing spoken words. Observe how those words are delivered. Tune into the person's hand gestures, facial expressions, and the position of their arms, legs, and feet.

5. Feel and demonstrate empathy.

Temporarily putting yourself in someone else's shoes allows you to listen with your heart. Listening must involve more than your ears and your brain. The other person must be able to sense your human response to what is being communicated

6. Process the information or message.

Eventually, you need to make sense of what you've heard. You must analyze it, appraise it, and connect the dots. Sometimes this happens within seconds. Ideally, processing takes place before responding.

7. Let the person finish before you jump in.

Interrupting is rude. Especially if you're constantly doing it. This behavior frustrates and diminishes the person who is attempting to describe a situation, relay critical data, or tell a story. Train yourself to wait until h/she concludes.

Internet sources provide several definitions for the word *listening*. My favorite comes from the International Listening Association: "the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages". The need to be heard, understood, and listened to is a basic human need. Further, you'd better be listening at work if you want to avoid misunderstandings, misinterpretations, unnecessary conflicts, stagnancy, and mistakes. Listening skills are life skills that must be part of your professional toolbox.

Recognizing that credible leadership requires effective listening, General Electric now proactively seeks and hires leaders with a listening track record. This company grasps the fact that positive listening habits can help to establish a cultural norm. Interesting, isn't it?

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What Clients Say

Initially, I hired Sylvia to provide me with solid strategies for managing my diverse Board of Directors more effectively. But a couple of months into the coaching engagement we uncovered what I soon saw was one of my biggest historical blind spots: listening to both Board members and staff persons through a very critical black and white filter. Approaching conversations without a healthy regard for the “gray” in every situation was causing relationship problems. Over time Sylvia helped me to acknowledge and appreciate the “gray” rather than fear it. Believe me, this didn’t happen quickly. For quite a while I resisted many of her observations and much of her guidance. On some level, though, I trusted her. Now, several years later, I clearly understand the accuracy of her messages to me. While this is always going to be an area of personal challenge, I can feel myself evolving. It sure makes a difference as I interact with key people at work!

- Barbara T., Nonprofit CEO, Southeastern PA

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Offers and Opportunities

FREE Email Coaching for Only One Person

Do you think you’re listening to someone at work but not seeing evidence of it in terms of the quality of the relationship or bottom line productivity? Do you feel like you need to be listening differently to somebody but don’t know how to go about it? If you answered yes to one or both of these questions, why not tap into this free offer? Simply send an email to sylvia@launchinglives.biz and describe the situation as clearly as possible. Within 24 hours Sylvia will reply to your message with laser coaching specifically related to your challenges. First come, first served. (No phone coaching involved.)

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RESOURCES

Self Assessment to Check Your Listening Efficiency

Use the following scale to rate your ability to listen in the workplace:

5=Always

4=Most of the time

3=Periodically, sporadically

2=Rarely

1=Never

_____ I look directly at people as they speak to me.

_____ I establish regular eye contact while people speak to me.

_____ I avoid interacting with electronic devices when trying to listen.

_____ I manage my mind chatter while trying to listen.

_____ I remain in a neutral space while listening to points being made.

_____ I notice speakers' facial expressions and body language.

_____ I understand why people say what they are saying.

_____ I receive their information/messages with clarity.

_____ I can feel a rapport with people as they are speaking.

_____ I allow people to finish talking before I start to talk.

Now add your scores together: _____

A total score of 40 or higher is one to celebrate. This means you have reasonable or excellent listening efficiency. A total score below 40? Consider investing effort into strengthening your personal listening efficiency. Your professional reputation and job performance depend on it.

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TIP

Go back to the self assessment resource above. Where was your lowest

score? Identify the reason behind that score. Then make a conscious choice to improve that score by just one point. Figure out what you must believe, assume, decide, say, and/or do to experience success. After you implement your shifted/changed beliefs, assumptions, decisions, language, and/or actions, observe results over a period of twenty-one days. Take note of what is different in your relationships, organizational culture, team productivity, etc. View this as an experiment. Even a slight improvement matters.

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Where in the World is SYLVIA?

On October 25, 2016 Sylvia traveled to Horsham, PA to provide two hours of intensive specific training for approximately twenty-five managers employed by OptumCare, PA and DE, a division of United HealthCare Services, Inc. headquartered in MN.

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About This Ezine

The purpose of this Ezine is to: 1) Provide readers with valuable FREE content which contributes to personal and professional growth as well as overall career development; and 2) Invite readers to take next steps toward working directly with Sylvia.

Back issues are [available here](#). Send an email by [clicking here](#) to manage your free subscription. Sharing content with attribution is encouraged as is forwarding the Ezine email. Include launchinglives.biz in your list of safe senders or friends, depending upon your email software, to be sure you receive the monthly emailed issues.

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About SYLVIA

Sylvia Hepler, Owner and President of Launching Lives, LLC, specializes in career development for both corporate and nonprofit executives and managers. Based in South Central PA, she specifically supports clients as they upgrade their current job performance, seek a promotion, or plan/navigate a career transition. What makes her services unique is that Sylvia helps people to cope with change, loss, and grief as they work on developing their careers. Her professional background includes: nonprofit executive management/leadership, nonprofit community health program start-up, program evaluation, public speaking, business and freelance writing, teaching, and retail sales.

A certified executive coach through The Rescue Institute in Golden, Colorado and Quantum Endeavors in Chicago, Illinois (plus a participant in extensive continuing education opportunities with several coaches of national notoriety), Sylvia offers individual and group coaching, assessments, teleseminars, workshops, keynote speeches, and retreats. She also has created tangible and downloadable products that augment her coaching and speaking services.

For more information and to connect with Sylvia try:

[Launching Lives Website](#)

[Click to contact Sylvia by Email](#)

Reach Sylvia by phone at **717-761-5457**

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Launching Lives SERVICES

Launching Lives, LLC is a full service career development company for managers and executives located in South Central PA. Utilizing a holistic approach to service provision, Launching Lives focuses on supporting clients as they create the platinum level career they desire by upgrading their job performance, seeking a promotion, or planning/navigating a career transition

Often people don't really know HOW they might benefit from coaching. Quite simply, ask yourself these questions: "What can't I seem to resolve on my own? What is keeping me awake at night? What am I missing when I look at a certain situation? How can I get to the next professional level? How can I learn

certain skills quickly? How can I narrow my professional gaps? How can I motivate my staff? How can I communicate more effectively so I serve myself and others better? How can I reduce my work-related frustration? How can I develop a viable plan of action for myself and/or my organization? How can I obtain greater job satisfaction? Coaching may be the SOLUTION to any of these issues.

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