

The art of listening

If you have to have the last word, it's time to listen up

Away from the stressful corporate world, I can now see gaps I had to work on. One was, and still is, to listen more actively and with intention. I am doing better, but you have to pay attention and catch yourself when you're ready to speak.



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Recently, I read a blog by Judith Glaser. She wrote that executives use “telling statements” 85 percent of the time, leaving just 15 percent for questions. Clearly we don't listen enough; we love to express ourselves, to enter into dialog and debates.

She states that the biological explanation is: when we sell, interact or express our views, our bodies release high-level reward hormones and we feel great. The more we talk, the better we feel.

To make things worse, the brain disconnects every 12-18 seconds to evaluate and process what's happening in the conversation, leaving little time to listen!

Also, the nature of business triggers egos and competitive behaviors that encourage executives to win arguments and have the last word.

Forms of listening

There are several types of listening, depending on the context and type of interaction:

- 1. Informative listening** focuses on receiving information and content, like in seminars or training sessions. The longer you listen, the harder it gets.
- 2. Appreciative listening** focuses on listening for pleasure or entertainment. It doesn't require much effort.
- 3. Critical listening** happens when you're faced with people you don't know or fully trust. Your brain tries

to figure out what's credible and trustworthy.

- 4. Discriminative listening** is differentiating between the words being said, the body language, the tone of the conversation and the surroundings. It requires all senses.
- 5. Emphatic listening**, the most intense form of listening, is where you go deep to understand the speaker's emotions, feelings and fears. It is most often neglected in business.

What does this mean? Listening is a skill that is necessary, in order to fully understand what you're listening to.

Slow it down

When managing and coaching, you have to slow down the pace of interaction and take a break between exchanges.

Some experts in value selling and negotiation recommend the two-second rule prior to responding, allowing the brain time to process and respond. Two seconds seems short. But in a fluid, interactive and maybe intense discussion, it's an eternity.

Executive development should include listening training. It should reinforce the need for equal attention to our thoughts and to other people's words and feelings.

Active and emphatic listening is an art that requires mindfulness, questioning skills and the capacity to tame one's ego and competitive nature. Easier said than done.

I am in listening training. I have the time to do it. I hope you can also catch yourself not fully listening to whomever you interact with. If you prepare your next answer while the other party is speaking, try the two-second rule. ●