

Managing the White Space – Listening

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You have just been promoted - Congratulations! or you have been a Supervisor / Manager / Leader for some time. How are you and your team hitting it off? Are instructions followed or are there conflicts with your direct reports or do you feel they should care more? You are in that place where you need to understand how to manage the white space.

White space is that area on an organizational chart that is between the boxes. The boxes represent specific job duties, tasks and other skills the person in that particular box must do to keep their job moving forward. The white space however, is a lot more difficult to manage. For example - how is the communication in your own organization? You may think that you over-communicate but the reality is that you may not. You may be thinking that if you are sending e-mails out to your team 4 and 5 times a day, you are really communicating.

Communication is a true two-way process that needs a sender and a receiver. The receiver needs to use their Listening Skills while the sender is sending. Also, when the sender becomes the receiver, they need to use their Listening Skills. Communication takes a little bit of work but the payoff is tremendous.

Good listening skills are not only needed in the work environment but every where you talk to people and they talk to you. Your spouse, children, store clerk, gas station attendant, clergy, in fact each and every interaction you have requires you to use good listening skills.

Listening can only be improved if you are aware of your listening behavior. Think about the following behaviors and rate yourself 1 to 5, 1 = Almost Never and 5 = Almost Always. Ready? Here we go!

How often do you not listen to uninteresting information? This may seem like a strange question, it is not. Think about a subordinate talking to you about a project you are not responsible for or care about or how about your spouse trying to talk with you about home issues while you are watching something on TV?

How often do you mentally criticize the speaker? I can present this data better or this guy takes his time to make the point or ??? You should be listening to what they are saying! Don't worry about the delivery, process the content!

How often do you react emotionally? A big one for sure. Do you get instantly angry or start crying when a particular topic comes up?

How often do you listen only for facts? This one ties back to uninteresting information. If you only focus on the facts, you will miss a lot of the supporting details.

How often do you fake attention? You are not a fan of the person doing the talking but you want to show interest so you indicate your listening when in reality, you are thinking about your next contact, sales call, meeting.

I have talked about five of the ten things you should ask yourself when listening to another person. In the next article I will discuss the last five and give you some practical approaches to improve your listening.