

CAREER HEALTH

How to Be a Great Listener

By Scott T. Love

I only drink water without ice when I go to restaurants.

“What would you like to drink, sir?”

“Water, with no ice, please,” I always respond to the waiter or waitress – Always!

And sure enough, forty percent of the time I get water with ice. I order it that way now just to test the wait staff and see what sort of a response I get. Then what’s even worse is that I measure the response rate and keep a mental tabulation to see what sort of ratios I come up with. I can’t help it. It’s the curse of being a management consultant. I measure everything.

The way waiters and waitresses listen to my request is the same way that many of us listen to our employees. We kind of expect to know what the answer really is, but we rarely take time to think and just listen to what they have to say. We fail to empathize and instead anticipate what they are going to say because we think we already know what they want...so we give them water with ice when they asked for something else. We let our conditioned response get in the way of legitimate listening.

Here are three steps to increase your listening power the next time a co-worker or subordinate employee brings an issue to you:

1. Sit down in chairs next to each other, not having a desk between you if possible. Take your conversation away from the plant floor. By taking the time to sit, it sends a signal to your employee or colleague that they are important enough for you to dedicate a few moments just to them.

2. Do NOT answer your phone while talking with your colleague. Has this ever happened to you before when someone else answered the phone while talking with you? I was at the front desk of a hotel in Manhat-

tan last week wanting to check in and go to bed and the clerk kept answering the phone and dealing with the callers when my issue wasn’t being addressed. Here I am looking at the clerk three feet away from me talking on the phone. So I pull out my cell phone, call the front desk of the hotel, and the clerk answered. I said, “I’d like to check in to your hotel, please.” He asked me when I would like to do this. I said, “Right now. I’m at your counter looking at you three feet away from you.” It worked. I now had his attention and checked in and went to bed. Don’t let this great American habit of answering the phone while someone else is in front of you interrupt your time with your colleague.

3. Empathize with what they’re telling you. Put yourself in their shoes so you understand their issue. Even if you disagree with them, people are usually okay with that as long as they are heard and as long as they are understood. This even works with two year olds. Whenever my son is frustrated because he doesn’t want me to pick him up, I always say, “Dagsen, you don’t want me to pick you up, do you? You seem very frustrated.” All of a sudden the cascading tears are replaced by a gentle nod affirming his emotion. Even though I have to pick him up, he knows that I understand his feelings and that I really heard him. How powerful would this be with your employees? This simple concept of empathy is the key to successful managing, leading, negotiating, and selling.

Bonus tip: Clarify your employee’s issue by repeating it back in your own words and asking questions about it.

By following these simple steps, you are sure to hear what your colleagues and team mates are really telling you, and not just what you anticipate to hear. If only I had the time to teach this concept to every restaurant that I visit.

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Beating Muscle Soreness from Long Days at Work

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wards the floor so that the right knee almost comes in contact with the floor. Make sure that the left knee is directly over the ankle, and the toes are lifted on the left foot.

Doing just ten to fifteen of these lunges on each side a couple of times a day will help your legs to feel much more energized and vital at the end of the day. You may even feel that your strength is improved in your muscle tone after a few weeks.

You can even work your inner thighs while you are at work. If you have the privacy of an office, stand with your feet more than shoulder distance apart while holding onto your desk or chair.

Lower yourself towards the floor on count one, squeeze your gluteus to pull you back up on count two, extend one leg straight behind you on three, and return the leg back to its original position on count four. Make sure that you are keeping your muscles relaxed, and that you are not tensing your upper body while you are working out.

Last but not least, take care of your lower back. Sitting at work for that long can cause great strain these muscles.

Sit up tall in your chair with the right leg crosses over the left. Gently look over your left shoulder, and rotate the body far enough so you feel a stretch along the lower back muscles.

Hold this stretch for about thirty seconds at a time, and repeat on each side. If you are careful to do these exercises every day, you will feel much better when you get to go home!

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-Michael Jordan

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We hope that you find these articles to be of value in improving the quality of your life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Beating Muscle Soreness from Long Days at Work

By Jack Landry

Long days at work can become quite exhausting-both mentally and physically. Sitting in the same position for several hours can leave you feeling sore and stiff, while giving you quite a headache.

If you are tired of feeling terrible every evening when you return home from work, it is time to take matters into your own hands right now. There are little stretches and exercises that you can do while at work to help yourself stay feeling well all day long.

Our children, spouses, and jobs are so demanding that it is often difficult to find time to give the gift of fitness to yourself. Not everyone has the luxury of working out on a treadmill or elliptical machine every day.

If you do not have the freedom to workout whenever you want to, you will need to do the little bit that you can at work. One of the best things you can do is to learn how to breathe properly while at work; this will help to relieve stress, and keep your muscles feeling relaxed.

Simply sit upright, relax your neck and shoulders, and take a deep breath in and out through your nose. Feel your diaphragm expand as you inhale.

After a few slow, deep breaths, you will put yourself in a much calmer, yet more energized state. Often we hold our breath while we are working, and learn-

ing to breathe throughout the day will help quite a bit.

Next, it is a good idea to try to stretch your neck throughout the day. To stretch the muscles in the neck, simply tilt your head to the right while looking straight ahead.

With your left hand, grab the bottom of your chair seat and lean a bit to the right. You will feel a huge stretch down the left side of the neck and shoulders-this will relieve tension, and can prevent headaches.

To stretch the back of the neck, simply look straight down, pressing your chin to your chest, and then repeat the exercise leaning the left ear to the side. Next, you can stretch your wrists, which are often strained and overused when typing and working at a computer all day.

To combat carpal tunnel syndrome from developing, gently apply pressure to the back of the right hand, enabling the fingers to point down towards the floor, stretching the top of the wrist. Your legs are another part of your body that can incur a great amount of strain.

To work the legs and gluteus, stand up and place your left hand on top of your desk for balance. Place the left in front of your right leg.

Keeping your ear, shoulder, hip, and right knee in a straight vertical alignment, gently lower yourself to-

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RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

The Best Answer Begins with the Right Question

By Todd E. Lindaman

It has just come to your attention that a customer filed a complaint about Mr. Smith, one of your employees. While your gut tells you that the customer may have overreacted a bit, there's enough information to warrant a meeting with Mr. Smith. You know from past experience that he's somewhat sensitive to criticism, but you have several legitimate concerns. How can you get the information you need without triggering a negative response from Mr. Smith?

You are meeting with a vendor who's behind schedule and over budget on a project. You don't want to jeopardize the job and you don't want to burn a bridge with this company. However, you're not at all satisfied with the way things are going and you need to take some answers back to your VP of Operations. What is your best approach?

It takes cooperation between every person involved to ensure the smooth operation of a company or organization. This is no small task and in the process there are likely to be ongoing interpersonal challenges. Whether you need information to help you address the need of a customer, resolve an employee issue, or effectively remedy a concern with a vendor, asking the right questions in the right way and at the right time can make all the difference. Good questions help everyone involved work toward a "win-win" outcome. They should be used to clarify information, not demean or criticize.

In order to ask the right questions in the right way you need to consider several key rules and strategies:

Listen! When someone feels understood they are more receptive of other's opinions, ideas and questions. Giving someone the opportunity, without inter-

ruption, to express themselves completely communicates interest in what they have to say and respect for them as a person.

Control your emotions. If you're angry or out of control, you lose respect and credibility. If your frustration has grown into anger, it may be best to avoid asking questions until you are able to get off the emotional escalator. As Thomas Jefferson advised, "If you are angry, count to ten before you respond. If you are really angry, count all the way to 100."

Start with something positive. No matter how much you may disagree with some-

"Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood."

-Freeman Teague, Jr.

one on a particular issue, try to find something positive to share about them or their efforts. Expressing appreciation or a sincere compliment before asking your question will often open the listener to hear what you have to say. It will show them that you are not the enemy and that you have the ability to think objectively.

Build on agreement. If your question is likely to reflect disagreement or an alternative point of view, attempt to find something you can agree on first and preface your question with it. Agreement on an issue, no matter how small, puts you in less of an adversarial role.

Avoid "why" questions. The word "why" can come across as accusatory, and communicates disappointment or disapproval. This one little word has the power to trigger a defensive reaction. This simple change in phrasing can keep the matter from becoming personal and allows you

to stay focused on the facts.

Stay off the soapbox. People sometimes use the opportunity to ask a question as a platform for expressing what they think the answer should be. If you are sincerely looking for information to increase your understanding, construct your question appropriately so the discussion can move forward.

Avoid personal attacks and sarcasm. Questions containing personal jabs or sarcasm greatly discount the value of an important question and may reflect a lack of personal integrity and self-control.

Ask "Do you agree?" One effective way to solicit dialogue is to state your understanding of the issue and the decision you believe is best and then simply ask, "Do you agree?" Sharing your views in this non-threatening manner gives the respondent the opportunity to both see your point and agree with you, or to disagree and offer information that will add to your understanding of the issue.

Ask "open-ended" questions. An open-ended question invites more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. It opens the door to more dialogue and the possibility for greater understanding. The open-ended question will likely tell you where the person stands on the issue, and also why they have taken the position that they have.

Well-constructed questions, asked in the right way and at the right time, increase the likelihood of productive dialogue. And remember, whether you are asking questions or expressing an opinion, if you treat people with courtesy and respect most of them will bend over backwards to cooperate with you as you work toward a successful resolution of the issue.

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INNER HEALTH

Nitty Gritty Reasons

By Jim Rohn

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be motivated to achievement by such a lofty goal as benevolence? I must confess, however, that in the early years of my struggle to succeed, my motivation was a lot more down-to-earth. My reason for succeeding was more basic. In fact, it fell into the category of what I like to call "nitty-gritty reasons." A nitty-gritty reason is the kind that any one of us can have -- at any time, on any day -- and it can cause our lives to change. Let me tell you what happened to me . . .

Shortly before I met Mr. Schoaff, I was lounging at home one day when I heard a knock at the door. It was a timid, hesitant knock. When I opened the door I looked down to see a pair of big brown eyes staring up at me. There stood a frail little girl of about ten. She told me, with all the courage and determination her little heart could muster, that she was selling Girl Scout cookies. It was a masterful presentation -- several flavors, a special deal, and only two dollars per box. How could anyone refuse? Finally, with a big smile and ever-so politely, she asked me to buy. And I wanted to. Oh, how I wanted to!

Except for one thing, I didn't have two dollars! Boy, was I embarrassed! Here I was -- a father, had been to college, was gainfully employed -- and yet, I didn't have two dollars to my name.

Naturally I couldn't tell this to the little girl with the big brown eyes. So I did the next best thing. I lied to her. I said, "Thanks, but I've already bought Girl Scout cookies this year. And I've still got plenty stacked in the house."

Now that simply wasn't true. But it was the only thing I could think of to get me

off the hook; and it did. The little girl said, "That's okay, sir. Thank you very much." And with that she turned around and went on her way.

I stared after her for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, I closed the door behind me and, leaning my back to it, cried out, "I don't want to live like this anymore. I've had it with being broke, and I've had it with lying. I'll never be embarrassed again by not having any money in my pocket." That day I promised myself to earn enough to always have several hundred dollars in my pocket at all times.

This is what I mean by a nitty-gritty reason. It may not win me any prize for great-

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

-Albert Einstein

ness, but it was enough to have a permanent effect on the rest of my life.

My Girl-Scout-cookie story does have a happy ending. Several years later, as I was walking out of my bank where I had just made a hefty deposit and was crossing the street to get into my car, I saw two little girls who were selling candy for some girls' organization. One of them approached me, saying, "Mister, would you like to buy some candy?"

"I probably would," I said playfully. "What kind of candy do you have?" "It's Almond Roca." "Almond Roca - that's my favorite. How much is it?" "It's only two dollars, two dollars? It couldn't be! I was excited. "How many boxes of candy have you got?" "I've got five."

Looking at her friend, I said, "And how many boxes do you have left?"

"I've got four." "That's nine. Okay, I'll take them all."

At this, both girls' mouths fell open as they exclaimed in unison, "Really?"

"Sure," I said. "I've got some friends that I'll pass some around to."

Excitedly, they scurried to stack all the boxes together. I reached into my pocket and gave them eighteen dollars. As I was about to leave, the boxes tucked under my arm, one of the girls looked up and said, "Mister, you're really something!" How about that! Can you imagine spending only eighteen dollars and having someone look you in the face and say, "You're really something?"

Now you know why I always carry a few hundred dollars on me. I'm not about to miss chances like that ever again.

And to think it all resulted from my own embarrassment, that when properly channeled, acted as a powerful motivator to help me achieve.

How about you? What nitty-gritty reasons do you have waiting to challenge and provoke you into a change for the better? Look for them, they are there. Sometimes it can be as simple as a brown-eyed girl selling Girl Scott cookies.

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