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How should your firm be talking?

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firm be talking?**

Plus

Post-performance review pals
Adding value to the business
And Stevens & Bolton profiled...

Have we forgotten how to listen?

It wasn't all that long ago that if one accidentally nudged the CapsLk key AND WROTE SOMETHING before realising, one would tut, delete and start again. Nowadays however it's often more common to apologise for 'shouting' (followed by the ubiquitous LOL).

We shout a lot these days and we seem to have forgotten how to listen. Even if we are listening it is, more often than at any time in the history of mankind, within our own bubble as we plug in the earphones and pull up the audio drawbridge.

There's a lot of shouting on social media too, which has turned us all into miniature broadcasting stations. Take this article for example. Go back a few years and I would've been declaiming this

atop a soap box at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park but now I can tweet about it, foist it upon friends and associates through emails or even let Google shout about it for me!

Recently there was the news that commuting on the London Underground equates to "being at a rock concert" in some sections of the Northern, Jubilee and Central lines. Hadn't really noticed? That's because every day our ears are bombarded by a cacophony of noise and yet the brain manages to filter the fuzz allowing us to focus on the audio information that is important.

Not listening is a big problem in every business. The ability to stop, forget about you, and hear what someone is saying, is a courtesy that seems to have

eroded as the modern world has got louder.

Most people are under the impression that business is all about getting your point across. Well, in some respects it is, but too few grasp the fact that interaction with another person is a two-way process: I talk, you listen. You talk, I listen.

Leaving deities, despots and dictators aside, in the history of deals, few have been made where just one person talks. That's because deals, when signing on the dotted line, are dependent on the give and take of relationships.

At every level of business, many firms suffer because people don't listen. This results in a failure to trust advice, frustration and individuals insisting on doing everything because nobody else can do the job properly. Invariably it is often the blood pressure, not the profit margin that begins to soar.

Great leaders listen. They take the time to understand what motivates and frustrates those they lead and the only way to do this is to listen. We all have things that we know a great deal about, but the world is full of lots of other people who know a great deal about other things. Therefore, listening is a wonderful opportunity to learn.

Listening is incredibly flattering. Really listening that is, and it takes a bit of effort. In this fast-paced frantic world, it is very easy to think that we have listened when in actual fact all we have done is heard. How many times, for example, have you been on a call whilst looking at emails – that is not listening; that is splitting your focus. Active listening involves removing distractions and focussing completely on the person who is speaking and what they are saying.

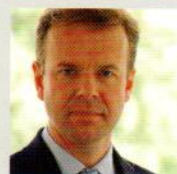
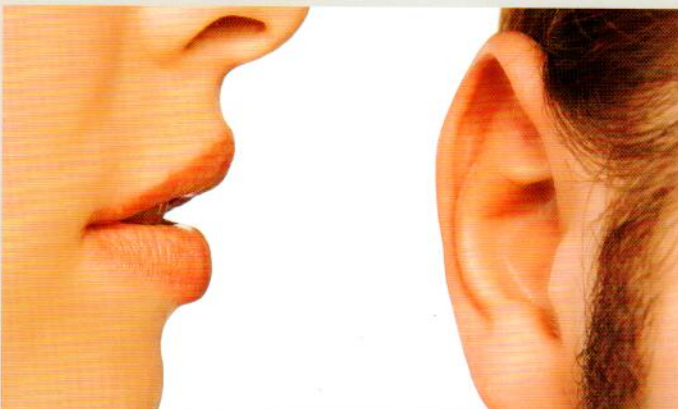
An important part of listening is subduing personal ego and not about waiting for

your turn to speak. If someone needs to talk to you they do not necessarily appreciate your continual raising of what they have said with your own achievements or experiences – this is really not that different to children in a playground competing with "my Dad does this", "well, my Dad does that with bells on" (this is clearly not an accurate transcript of playground chatter!)

Rather than listening to respond, listen to listen. A touch of modesty and empathy will go a long way when you are next actively listening to someone. Look at them, indicate that you are present with affirmative noises and focus on what they are saying. Don't turn the conversation on to you, don't be over zealous in your rush to offer an opinion or chuck in endless meaningless statements along the lines of "I know what you mean" but rather be considered in your approach and clarify that you have understood what has been communicated to you through the judicious use of questions and, where possible, use some of the language that has been delivered to you back to the speaker in your question to them.

Listening is a fundamental skill in pretty much any relationship; it is perhaps the most sincere form of respect one can give another person and depending on your own level of self-awareness you will know if you are a good listener or if you need to focus on developing some of the crucial techniques of how to listen effectively.

In the words of Ernest Hemingway: "I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening. Most people never listen."



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