



Family Time

It's November! In just a matter of weeks, we will usher in a brand new year.

Now, some of us find great joy in the celebrations that mark the November and December calendars. For others, the most descriptive sentiment is _____. (I'll defer to you on the word that best meets your fill-in-the-blank purposes.)

You see, although the holidays may bring to mind images of faith, festivities, food, and fun, they also often bring us face-to-face with family and friends. And, sometimes it's those people-related parts of the season that present the greatest challenges.

So, in this month's edition of **EA Insights**, we pause for a moment to examine an aspect of communication that may yield as many benefits at the Thanksgiving table as it does in the office. Let's focus on the art of listening. With hope, you'll take away a thought or two that will help you to reduce the strain of holiday, and workday, events.

All the best,

June

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Are You Listening?

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There's an interesting term that's being bandied around these days -- *over-communicate*. You hear it at meetings; you read it in emails and other written tools. The gist of it is that the speaker or writer is committing to go beyond the Happy Meal-variety of communication and, essentially, to super-size it!

What makes me smile most, though, when the "over-communicate" notion is tossed into the mix, is its typical translation. The statement usually means, "I, [statement-maker], am putting you on notice that I'm about to do a lot of talking or writing so that you grasp my ideas." (Yup, hold on because you're about to get a fire hose of information to ensure that you know exactly what I mean, or need, or expect. And, fair warning, the hose won't run dry after one spray; these messages will continue until it is clearer than clear that you've understood the communique inside and out.)

Unfortunately, missing from most over-communicate exercises is a vital part of communication -- that is, *listening*. After all,



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"Quotes"

"Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking."
~Bernard Baruch

"Listening, not imitation, may be the sincerest form of flattery."
~Joyce Brothers

"Part of being successful is about asking questions and listening to the answers."
~Anne Burrell

"I'm a very strong believer in listening and learning from others."
~Ruth Bader Ginsburg

*"I learned to listen and listen very well. *** The person who talks a lot or talks over people misses out because they weren't listening."*
~Jackie Joyner-Kersey

"[So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it.]"

communication is two-way. It's as much about getting your ideas and information out there for others as it is about hearing from them both to ensure their understanding of you and to allow them to factor in their thoughts, feedback, and more so that you can arrive at a meeting of the minds. True communication is give-and-take and take-and-give, not give-and-give-and-give some more.

Dedication to effective and robust communication is extremely important, and efforts to improve it are to be applauded.

But, are you *listening*?

Listening goes beyond just hearing that the other person is saying something (or that a response has been written). Are you truly taking the time to seek his/her view and to understand that perspective once shared?

If more impactful communication is your goal, let me offer four pointers for improving your listening.

Give your undivided attention.

Bottom line: Multitasking and listening do not go well together. Whether the message being sent your way is a spoken, written, or visual one, you will be challenged to receive it if your mind is divided between message and _____. (Feel free to insert emails or texts or your ever-growing task list or dinner plans or anything other than the other person and his/her message.) Effective listening requires attention.

Stay focused.

A big challenge, when receiving a message, is that we often begin framing a response immediately. As soon as the wheels start turning with defensiveness or new ideas or another perspective, the ears (or, for a reader, the eyes) shut down to the original message. And, when that happens, you miss some, if not all, of what the sender hoped you would take away. For that reason, listening well (with your ears or eyes) requires focus from start-to-finish of the person's statement to you.

Ask questions.

It is easy to assume that you know what the message means, the extent of the situation's impact, or what the need actually is. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. However, even if you do have a good sense of what is being shared with you, asking questions demonstrates your engagement as well as your desire to understand. As you ask, the other person can clarify or elaborate. Misunderstandings can be corrected. Concepts or attempts to share feelings can be refined.

Now, please note that this recommendation about asking questions is shared to further understanding, not to interrogate. So, watch the tone. The goal is to show that you're interested enough to dig deeper, that your interaction is to go beyond the surface and to sincerely grasp what the other person is attempting to share.

Respect the perspective, even if you don't agree.

You won't agree with everything you hear or read or see. Honestly, though nice, agreement is secondary. The real test of listening well rests in your ability to perceive what is being relayed to you and to respect the fact that the other person has shared his/her perspective... even if you don't agree with it.

True and effective communication -- transmitting messages and receiving them -- is a muscle to be exercised on a daily basis for professional and personal success. Just as you might call on a personal trainer to help you reach your physical goals, call on us at **Executive Advantage** to help you reach your communication and other professional development goals. We're here to help you over-communicate (when appropriate) in ways that truly make a positive difference for everyone involved in the exchange. [Contact us today.](#)



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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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~Jiddu
Krishnamurti

"When people express opinions that differ from yours, take it as a chance to grow. Seek to understand over being understood. Be curious, not defensive. The only way to disarm another human being is by listening."

~Glennon Doyle
Melton

"Learning is a result of listening, which in turn leads to even better listening and attentiveness to the other person."

~Alice Miller

"Diplomacy is listening to what the other guy needs. Preserving your own position, but listening to the other guy. You have to develop relationships with other people so when the tough times come, you can work together."

~Colin Powell

"Listening is a master skill for personal and professional greatness."

~Robin S. Sharma

"Ears are made not for hearing but for listening. Listening is an active skill, whereas hearing is passive. Listening is something that we have to work at - it's a relationship with sound. And yet, it's a skill that none of us are taught."

~Julian Treasure