



people
make the
difference

People Make The Difference whitepaper

May 27 2017

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Are you listening close enough?

It won't come as a surprise that hearing and listening are two very different things. No doubt, you've been frustrated by someone in the past who hasn't listened effectively to what you've said. Unfortunately, many of us don't realise that we're not listening properly until it's too late, but it's an essential skill for anyone in a team environment, leader or not.

In a standard day, we spend 80% of our time communicating with others. Of course, this is made up by emails, meetings, texts, reading documents and speaking. The majority of our communication however, is listening. Having a strong and bold voice is important – necessary even – but knowing when to be quiet and listen to understand others is just as important.

What happens when you don't listen?

People who don't listen properly usually – consciously or subconsciously – think they have all the answers. Being disinterested in listening means that you don't really understand anyone else's point of view and you're not open to discovering new solutions to issues within your team.

For leaders, listening is crucial. If you don't listen, you miss out on hearing the concerns, joys and thoughts of your team. Without that insight, it becomes difficult to motivate the team and inspire them towards your collective goal.

How can we listen effectively?

Being conscious of your listening abilities is always the first step. Be aware of what you need to do to concentrate and give the other person your full attention. There are some simple things you can start to implement:

Stop interrupting – not only are you telling the other person that you think what you have to say is more important, you're not really listening to understand them, you're listening to respond. Take the time to consider what they've said and respond thoughtfully, instead of interrupting.

Get rid of distractions – it might be your phone, a window with people walking by or even the task you're currently working on. Whatever it is that distracts you, remove it from the situation. It's very obvious when you're not paying attention and the speaker can pick up on your distractedness and they may feel less valued.

Listen with your eyes – eye contact is definitely important, but you also need your eyes to be paying attention to body language. Words are not the only way to communicate, sometimes people say things with their mouths but their body language doesn't line up. It's your job, as the listener, to pick up on this.

Ask questions – some people think that asking questions makes it seem as though you're not listening. Not true! Asking thoughtful questions can show the speaker that you were listening, you care and you're interested to find out more. Ask open-ended questions when you can, so that you are expressing interest in keeping the conversation going.

Speaking well goes hand-in-hand with listening well. When everyone speaks clearly and listens intently, we all end up on the same page with very little confusion along the way. They are both key to creating transparent and effective team relationships.

If you're ready to enhance your listening skills to be a better leader, People Make The Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peplemakethedifference.com.au.