Listen Up! The Underrated Superpower in Business

Being a good listener is an underrated superpower in the business world. Success in business depends on relationships where clarity and trust are critical to decision making. This is of particular importance in finance where strategies are formed based on the analysis of complex information and interactions.

American psychologist Carl Rogers said “Man’s inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively.” While in most cases an inability to listen can result in a failed relationship or interaction, in others such as the aviation industry the results can be fatal.

In today’s fast-paced business world, communication is key. Whether you're in a leadership role, working with clients, or collaborating with colleagues, being a good listener can dramatically improve your relationships, decisions, and overall performance.

Listening isn’t just about hearing words - it’s about fully understanding and responding to the message being communicated. And yet, in the midst of busy schedules, constant distractions and the drive to “get to the point,” many of us miss the mark on truly listening.

So, how can you benefit from the power of listening? Here are 6 ways to become a better listener:

Become an Active Listener

There’s a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is passive, and listening is active and intentional. Active listening involves paying attention not just to words, but to

tone, emotion, and body language as well. Look at the context in which words are shared as well as verbal and nonverbal cues.

Listening requires presence, not just silence. When we actively listen we practice mindfulness and we are "present" with those around us. Don't let distractions take you away from the moment. You might miss vital cues from what is being said during the conversation.

Listen with Intent and Compassion

One of the key principles outlined by Steven Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* includes: "Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood." It's important to listen with the intent to understand. Covey said most people listen with the intent to *reply* – tuning out parts of the conversation. Tuning out means we'll never really be present with the person in front of us giving us little chance of fully understanding them. As well, they will not feel heard nor that their opinions are of value.

From a leadership perspective, being a poor listener means we will not have the information needed to lead teams and help team members maximize their potential.

Listening with intent also means tuning out or eliminating both internal and external distractions. How many of us have been on a zoom call where someone or something in the background was distracting listeners? While the odd surprise will happen, it's essential to try to minimize distractions from the start of a conversation.

Don't Interrupt

When speaking to colleagues or clients, take the "there aren't any bad ideas" philosophy. Interrupting people can disrupt the flow of ideas and lead to misunderstandings. Let others finish their thoughts as it will lead to a more productive discussion.

When you interrupt someone, you make them feel unheard and invalidated. Criticism is a great way to kill creativity. Letting people finish without interruption shows you value their perspective and opinions creating an atmosphere of creativity and collaboration.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions

Ask clarifying questions to be sure you understood feedback or instructions correctly. This is also a common technique in sales training used to obtain buy-in. The question: "*What I hear you saying is…is that right?*" is a powerful tool to understanding the other person's point of view.

The use of questions ensures that the other person is being listened to, and can serve as a prompt to be sure important details aren't overlooked. They're also a great way to handle objections.

Questions should be meaningful as they establish your investment in the speaker's message. If used effectively, they can also open up a new line of dialogue that might be worth exploring.

Monitor Your Emotions

The art of listening goes beyond an exchange of words. It's also about understanding and connecting the emotions behind them. If someone says "this sounds like a great deal!" but their tone lacks conviction, it's possible they still have lingering doubts.

Slow down the pace of conversation if things get emotional. Watch your breathing. Someone speaking too rapidly might feel pressured and want to move on from the conversation.

You want to keep the other person engaged so you don't discount anything important they might have to say.

Manage Your Time

The world of business is fast-paced and everyone is striving to get ahead. There's a lot of pressure to perform and it's not always easy to fit tasks into one single workday.

Being an effective listener means scheduling a time when you are free from other distractions. You owe the speaker your undivided attention. Don't clutter up your schedule so you're unable to focus on the conversation.

Take steps to control your environment. If possible, arrive early to acclimate yourself to new surroundings or if on a virtual call ensure technology is working properly.

The most successful leaders know how to leverage the power of listening to make people feel heard and valued. Employers who fail to listen and respond to people's concerns will see greater turnover. While listening is critical to professional success, it can also be mentally and physically taxing without proper training.

Taking steps to understand the "why" behind everyday conversations creates the foundation for effective communication and meaningful connections both at work and at home.

So listen up! The next time you're in a conversation, remember: It's not enough to just hear the words - make sure you're listening both actively and intentionally. The insights you'll gain and the relationships you'll build will be well worth the effort.