

Listening in Communications and Time

—Friends or Enemies of Leaders?

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Abstract: This article mainly discusses two terms in university management—listening in communications and time. It explores the reasons for not having enough time and offers the effective tools in time management. It also explores the essential way in communications, that is, listening.

Keywords: time management; tools of time management; listening; listening blocks

I. How to manage time?

Now, let's talk about time. How often do you say things like - I wish I had more time or there's not enough time to do everything I need to do? How often do you have people tell you or hear them tell someone else that they do not have enough time to do something or use not having enough time as an excuse or reason why something was not done. My guess is that everyone has used lack of time as an excuse and has heard others use the same excuse on many occasions.

Sometimes, when someone uses a lack of time excuse with me, I might respond by saying something like:

You have the same number of hours everyday that Albert Einstein had? Or,

You have the same number of hours everyday that Bill Gates has?

What is your problem?

1. Reasons for not having enough time

The problem, as we know, is in the way we manage our time. Before talking about how we might manage our time better, let's look at some of the rea-

sons we might not have enough time. I'll give you six reasons.

The first reason is attempting too much at the same time. You over commit yourself to doing too many projects or trying to be in too many different places. You either have a problem saying no when people ask you to do things or you need to do a better job of setting your priorities.

The second reason is what we call procrastination. You like to put things off. Perhaps, for some things, you say - why does it today when I can delay doing it until tomorrow or later. When you think about putting things off, try to remember this - when you put off until tomorrow what can be done today, you lose today forever. You can never get the time back that you could have used today but decided not to use.

The third reason is that you cannot say NO - some invites you to dinner, you go; there's an invitation to a party, you go; your friends want you to go the Club, you go; someone wants you to take a day off from work to go somewhere, perhaps a sports event or perhaps shopping, with them - maybe you don't want to go, but you do not know how to say NO

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so you go anyway. After a while, not saying NO becomes a habit and you easily agree to do things that you do not enjoy and wish later you had not done.

Some people do not have enough time for the fourth reason and this is personnel disorganization. They are disorganized, cannot make a plan for getting through a day, their desks are a mess, they cannot find things, they are late for meetings, and probably should have an assistant just to keep them organized. These people are also usually disorganized in their personal life and not just at work.

The fifth reason why you might not have enough time is because you make unrealistic time estimates. You think you can do things faster than it is possible for you to do them. When you have a project or a task, take time to think about it before estimating the time needed to complete it and try to be realistic about how long it will take. If your boss gives you a project today and asks you when you will finish it and you say it will take two days, they will expect it from you in two days. If it takes longer, he may not be happy about hearing "not enough time" as an excuse. With people you supervise, help them develop realistic time estimates with projects and tasks that you give them to do.

The sixth reason why you might not have enough time is lack of self-discipline. We talked earlier about self-management being one of the important management competencies. A lack of self-discipline, like the other reasons for not having enough time, has been around for a long time as a barrier to work efficiency.

2. The "80-20 rule" in time management

We know the reasons but are not always successful in finding ways to deal with them. About a hundred years ago, an economist from Italy named Pareto became famous for something called the "80-20 rule". It said that most people are efficient only during 20% of their time during the day and inefficient for 80% of the time. Some of you would say this is still true; others of you would say it is true of a few people.

The "80 - 20 Rule", also called the Pareto Principle, says that there are certain results that people want to get, in their personal life or professional life. Many people are easily distracted and do not make

effective use of time. They have trouble staying focused (concentrating) on what should be done. It's easy for them to waste a lot of time or spend a lot of time doing things that they would rather be doing than what they should be doing. For example, sometimes, even some of you, when you should be working, let yourself be distracted and spend time having long talks with your friends or checking the news or sports on the computer or reading the newspaper.

You waste a lot of time and then realize that you are accomplishing very little. As your time to do something gets short, you become more focused on what you are doing. You know that you must do it, that you have only a little time left to do it, and you usually get a little mad or frustrated with yourself because you know you have been wasting too much time.

With time management, you can organize yourself to ensure that you get the greatest benefits possible in the time you have. Most of us know what we should do to manage our time. The problem is that we either do not do it or we don't do it enough. Now, we will review some things that most of you know and talk about remembering to do them

3. Tools of time management

How to improve time management? A lot can be done by just thinking about it and organizing yourself. Already, you practice time management some everyday, both at home and at work - what we need to do is make your time management more effective. I am sure that some of you already do some of these things that we call the tools of time management. Important in all of these is self-discipline. You must make yourself do it and avoid distractions as much as possible.

One way to look at time management is to say that you must plan your work and then work your plan. You heard me use this expression earlier when we talked about the functions of a manager. A plan loses its meaning if you do not follow it. Now, let's discuss some of the tools of time management.

3.1 Deciding your priorities - This helps you to be sure you are spending your time on the right things. What are the most important things that you need to do? What things are urgent and have a deadline that you must meet.

3.2 Planning to solve problems or accomplish tasks - Sometimes, we can call these action plans if they are for your work. Think about each problem or task and then plan how to best accomplish what you need to do and then do it.

3.3 Make "To Do" lists and prioritize them - This helps you to do the most important things first. These lists are important and even the heads of some large companies do them (or have their assistants do them). Some people think they can remember everything and don't bother with lists. Then, later, they don't understand how they could have forgotten something. Do yourself a favor and made the "to do" lists. They help.

3.4 Effective scheduling - This is planning to make the best use of your time. When we talked about what a manager does, the first thing we said was that a manager plans. Planning an effective schedule is important and a manager needs to make action plans.

3.5 Personal goals - Never lose sight of your personal goals and decide how these fit in with your priorities.

3.6 Activity logs - Sometimes it helps to keep personal records for several days or even a week on how you spend your time. Keep records of everything, what you do at work, what you do at home, the other things you do. This will tell you how you really spent your time and if you spent it effectively. Review your activity log after a few days and you can usually find ways that you could have used your time more effectively. Then, apply this to your future activities.

3.7 What is your time worth - We say time is money. Look at your pay and look at what you have done for your employer. Is the employer getting value for your time? If you were in your boss's position, would you be satisfied with the work you have done.

If you remember these time management tools and use them, you will be a better manager and a better employee for your organization after you finish your studies. Just as important, you will probably be a happier person because you will know that you have tried your best to manage your time efficiently and you will have more time available to use as you wish. This extra time for yourself is something that

all of us want.

II. Listening in Communications

1. Listening

Communications are listed as one of the key management competencies. We use the word receptivity when we talk about some of the skills you should have or develop to be a good leader and receptivity means listening to the ideas and opinions of others. There is a difference between just hearing and really listening to what is said. In a management environment or any situation where you work or have contact with others, listening is important. Sometimes, not listening effectively to your employees, co-workers, or customers can be the difference between success and failure.

Of all the communications skills, listening is the one that usually gets the least attention but is just as important as any of them. There has been a tendency in business and in education to stress the speaking, reading, and writing skills. Now, people are beginning to realize how important listening is and some say it could be the most important of all the communications skills not just as a management or business skill but just as important at home and in your personal lives.

2. Listening blocks

One of the best ways to improve your listening skills is to understand some of the common behaviors you and others might have when you are not listening effectively. These behaviors are called blocks. These blocks are not always bad but you should understand when and why they might be bad.

2.1 Rehearsing - This is when you are only partly listening because you are thinking about and preparing in your head what you might say next if you must say something. This is like you are practicing to yourself what to say next and you are not really listening. When you think too much about what to say next, you might find that the subject has changed or you embarrass yourself by saying something that has already been said. Some people can have an entire conversation that they practice in their head and they project ahead and try to imagine - I will say this and he will respond by saying that and then this is what I will say next.

2.2 Judging - Sometimes we judge people in advance and this can limit your listening ability especially when you judge them in a negative way. If you prejudge someone as incompetent or not knowing enough, then you usually do not pay attention to what that person says. A basic rule of listening is that judgments should be made only after you have heard and evaluated what the person says.

2.3 Identifying - This means that you identify or relate to what someone is saying back to your own personal experiences. If someone tells you, for example, about a toothache, you start telling about a terrible toothache you once had; someone starts telling about a bad teacher he once had, then you talk about your experience with a bad teacher. You start your story before the other person finishes his story and this means that you have not listened to the other person's story.

2.4 Advising - You think you are the great problem solver and can help anyone solve problems. You do not need to hear more than a few sentences before you think about the advice you should give. Then, you start giving your advice and trying to convince someone to do as you suggest. When this happens, you might miss what is really important because you interrupted the person before he finished.

2.5 Sparring - In fighting, sparring is like when fighters practice - they hit back and forth but are not trying to hurt each other badly. In management and in personal relations, people spar when they argue back and forth. You start arguing with a person who feels you never heard him because you were so quick to disagree. Your main focus is on finding things to disagree with.

2.6 Being right - This means that you will do almost anything to avoid being wrong. You feel like you must be right all the time, you don't listen to criticism, and you cannot take suggestions to change. You stop listening when anyone questions what you say. You are willing to make excuses and to even twist or change facts to make yourself look right.

2.7 Derailing - This happens when you get tired or bored of a conversation or perhaps do not like the subject. Instead of continuing to listen, you suddenly

change the subject. This is derailing.

2.8 Placating - This comes from the word - placate - and means to make calm. You always want to be nice, pleasant, look to others like you are always supportive of them, and you very much want people to like you. You agree with everything. You may listen just enough to get a small idea of what is being said but you are not really involved.

2.9 Dreaming - When we dream, and we usually call it daydream because we are not sleeping, we are thinking about other things - places we would rather be, things we would rather be doing. It's like having a television inside your brain and changing stations to a more entertaining station.

3. Steps in improving listening

Like any skill, the first step to improving your listening skills is to know and admit that you need to improve them. You must know what you can do or can stop doing so you can get better. The second step is usually the most difficult and this is to make yourself do the things that you need to do to improve your listening skills.

Listening, if you do it effectively, can become one of your most powerful communications tools - not just for managers but for anyone.

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