



WE HEARD YOU

Celebrate the power of listening and
check out what some of you
had to say



Bob Benowitz

Former Executive Vice President of Operations,
Primrose Schools

"Nothing says you care more when you remember and use a person's name when addressing them..."

Listening is an important detail in building trusted relationships, personally and in business. It is like sweeping the corners clean because you are paying attention to everything a person is saying and using the information to reinforce the relationship.

One of the best things to listen to and remember is a person's name. Nothing says you care more when you remember and use a person's name when addressing them. Throughout my career I visited and toured many schools meeting management team members and teaching staff. On return visits to those schools I would address as many people as I could by their name because I listened and remembered them. This simple act made staff feel important and special and strengthened their bond with the company.



Steve Blanc

President / Managing Director,
Blanc Ventures

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand they listen with the intent to reply."

The greatest gift you can give people is to listen to them. To be an active listener. Leaning in, being aware of body language, looking at them with intent, mirroring back what you hear (not what they said). Active listening creates trust.

When I am engaged to teach sales or leadership skills in workshops I demonstrate different ways to listen with a volunteer and I consistently get emotional and intense feedback on the effect from the volunteer and the class. The crystallization of what active listening looks like, feels like and sounds like is one of the most important exercises I do. It takes work and focus to keep steady and not jump your thinking to the you, but rather to stay focused on listening.



Albert Cantu

Owner, Cantu Pest Control

"Just because you hear doesn't mean you listen."

Listening is essential in getting to the heart of any customer or employee matter. In the service business these are the two greatest areas for success or failure.

As a young branch manager, I learned the difference in the two while dealing with a potential union situation in one of our Pittsburg, PA offices. We had a management change and prior management was ineffective and let the employees dictate the work environment, consequently there was no discipline or accountability which led to dissatisfaction among various employee groups. As news of the organization effort reached HR we were mobilized to address the issue. The new management team was basically holding people accountable for the tasks, goals and objectives of their duties. The employees felt they were being picked on. Once I met with the group it was evident that their concern was fear of replacement. They didn't understand why they were being corrected. The new team instituted retraining not only on work skills but on performance metrics. The employees responded positively to the coaching and several thanked me for listening. All we "heard" was union, but when we listened to what the issues were, they were able to be addressed. The company and employee performance improved. Crisis averted!



Sebastien Goulet

President / CEO, CardLogix Corporation

"It is important to be able to listen and be willing to listen so that your customers, employees and board members understand that you keep an open mind to make the best decision going forward..."

Ideas, solutions, criticism and recommendations comes from anyone, but you need to listen (to whoever it is) to gain this knowledge and apply the best course forward.

It is important to be able to listen and be seen to be willing to listen so that your customers, employees and board members understand that you keep an open mind to make the best decision going forward.

As I gathered my team for a business meeting, to discuss a customer issue, we gathered the senior leadership team to review the issues and make recommendations on how to resolve the issue that was at hand. After discussions and reviewing the pros and cons, an idea was selected to pursue and implement from one of the engineering department division. However, because of the complexity of our solution, we included junior engineers to our discussion only to find out that, what we had in mind, could be done, but there was a much more effective solution that could be achieved that would resolve this customer issue, but also improve future issues in the future. By digging deeper and bringing other mindsets, with different experiences, we were able to all learn about the latest technology available to improve our performance while remembering to keep ourselves aware of what is available from our own employees.



Marc Graham

President / CEO, Synergy Global Business Solutions

"You learn quickly that there are elements of every business that you can learn to do better every day if you just listen to everyone in the business..."

As a manager it is so easy to overrun a conversation because you believe you know more than those that surround you in the project or conversation. You learn quickly that there are elements of every business that you can learn to do better every day if you just listen to everyone in the business. Many times, associates will enlighten you on better processes or things that you think are working but are not.

Get out of the office and listen, get in the field and travel with associates, really talk to warehouse personnel, shipping personnel, retail, associates. Be humble and you learn a lot.

Louis Gerstner while at IBM said, "A desk is a terrible place from which to run a business". I couldn't agree more.



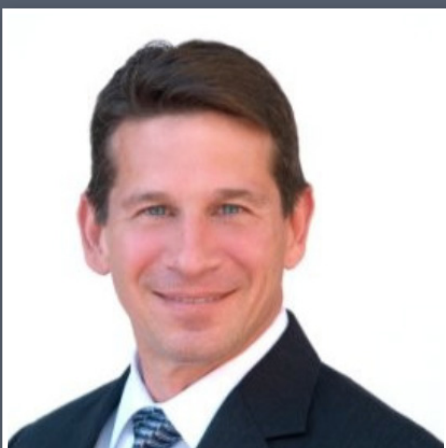
Bill Ellermeyer

Principal, Ellermeyer Connect

"...when you are out developing business on the 'networking train' always remember to initially let the other person do most of the talking before talking about yourself."

BE A GOOD LISTENER.

Be a good listener, when you are out developing business on the "networking train" always remember to initially let the other person do most of the talking before talking about yourself. Listening is usually more important than what you will be saying to have a chance to build a relationship; ask a few questions, listen and then give them something that might relate to what they said like a book title, article, event or personal referral connection. This will give you a better chance of developing an actual relationship beyond "nice to meet you".



Mike Kovar

CPA, CFA

Principal, Middle Market CFO Services

"I believe listening is a lost art and, being exceptional at this, can be a differentiating factor in a competitive marketplace..."

"You may be listening but you are not hearing."

One must listen to customers or risk losing them. Further, engaging with customers on solutions can provide a roadmap for future products with those customers becoming part of the solution.

I had always thought I was a good listener until I found myself finishing sentences for others. This really turned off a client and caused me to reflect on past lost opportunities. I now believe that my failure to truly understand the challenges my customers faced and my own incorrect perceptions of their problems were major factors in failing to secure businesses. I believe listening is a lost art and, by being exceptional at this, can be a differentiating factor in a competitive marketplace.



Steve Lattman

Operating Executive, Steve Latterman Associates

"Listen, but ALWAYS verify..."

Years ago, I accepted a CEO position running a PE-owned manufacturer and importer of consumer products. The company had decreased in portfolio value every year during the twelve preceding years under the PE management.

The company was the second horse in a two-horse field, and "enjoyed" a low single digit market share in a business where 50% of all sales were done through the two national home center chains.

On day one, I sat down with the four sales managers to assess the situation. The team, led by the V.P. of Sales, a thirty-year company veteran, gave me a laundry list of "deals" they were working on, including proposals they had with the two largest customers in the industry.

I retired to my office, where I pored through the file cabinets and computer files, and with the exception of one presentation made to one of the two home center chains done eight years prior, could find no records of any meetings or proposals given to those two major customers.

I asked the V.P. of Sales to set up a meeting with the customer they had never called on and suggested that I'd like to join him at the meeting. Six weeks later, the two of us flew cross country for our meeting, signed in at the reception desk, and awaited the buyer's arrival.

The buyer and his assistant walked in, my VP of Sales jumped up and introduced himself to the buyer, turned to the assistant, and said it was good seeing her again. She smiled and said that she had just started that week.

As we walked to the meeting room down the hall, I asked the buyer how long he'd been buying the category. "Twelve years", he replied. I smiled.

Under twelve years of ownership by the PE firm, with declining top line and profitability each year, with the same management team in place, the sales executives had never once even called on one of the two customers that purchased half of the entire category of products.

The exercise gave me insight as to why the company had been declining in value, and a window into what needed to be done to reverse the company's decline.

We enjoyed five consecutive years of growing revenue and EBITDA, increased market share, were able to sell the business to a strategic for a maximum multiple, and gave a successful conclusion to the Private Equity firm's investment.

The moral of the story: Listen, but ALWAYS verify!



Peter Michel

Former CEO, Brink's Home Security

"Face to face listening provides opportunities for insight because of what the other person omits in describing the situation..."

Face to face listening provides opportunities for insight because of what the other person omits in describing the situation. Open ended questions facilitate such productive interactions.



Mark Parrish

Managing Partner, Parrish Partners

"Listening is a four-step process which starts with hearing and ends with a response. No response? No listening!"

I always like differentiating the physiology of hearing and the psychology of listening. Hearing is the physical stimulation of the cochlea.

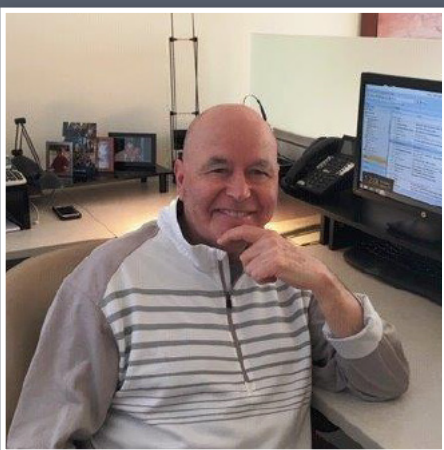
Listening is a four-step process which starts with hearing and ends with a response. No response? No listening!

Active listening therefore is a discipline (a practice which is unnatural) and requires the practice of the following four sequential acts to "H.E.A.R." are:

- 1) Hear
- 2) Empathize/Seek to Understand Their Position
- 3) Analyze/Evaluate Your Position
- 4) Respond

Example. Imagine being greeted with silence when you turn to a loved one and say, "Honey, I love you." No response? No listening!

Thanks for listening.



Bud Pironti

President, JSD

"You are boring when you talk about yourself, less boring when you talk about others and interesting when you talk about ideas..."

"Listen enthusiastically, always with a smile..."

You are boring when you talk about yourself, less boring when you talk about others and interesting when you talk about ideas. I found you could solve any problem if you engaged the other side with ideas always trying to hitchhike on their lead.



Bruce Smythe

President PBS Management

"The key to this discovery and result was respectful listening at a deep level..."

After assuming a new role at Lennox Industries as Director, Advanced Manufacturing, I was faced with a classic, yet troubling issue. In reviewing the profiles of my engineering team, I noticed that a Sr. Engineer had not had a raise for over five years. When I inquired about this with other management, I was told he was a lost cause and management consensus was that he should have been terminated years ago. Apologetically, the other manager said it was now my responsibility to handle the termination. My experience in change management and dealing with people led me to believe there was more to the story. I immediately set up an interview with the engineer. Upon meeting the engineer, he seemed disheveled, discouraged, head down and no eye contact. I could tell he was a defeated man. Then without prejudice, I made it my purpose to really understand who he was as a person, then what he had experienced with the company as an engineer. I asked the engineer to describe what he was engaged in, and more importantly what did he feel was his best contribution to the company over the years. Then I LISTENED! I had him tell me his whole story and set of experiences. He was reluctant and suspicious at first, and initially only gave me a short overview. Carefully and delicately, I encouraged him to tell me more about his experiences, and again I shut up and listened. As I listened respectfully, I could tell we were establishing trust he had not known. He was so used to being ignored and "talked over" during past years he had just withdrawn. It was critical to not talk or he would have been too afraid and not shared his story. The more he shared the more I saw a highly skilled engineer with a somewhat reserved personality that had simply been mismanaged over the years. After a lengthy meeting I could tell that the engineer was a true diamond in the rough. I asked him to return with his recommendations about how he could make his best and brightest contribution to the company. He came back with excellent analysis he had performed in the past that had been ignored and excitedly shared his ideas and project recommendations. I quickly did the math in my head and saw, literally, a million-dollar operational improvement opportunity. We "partnered" together, developed plans; and I gave him a special assignment to pursue his process improvement ideas. He fulfilled them masterfully and in fact he saved the company over a million dollars. The key to this discovery and result was respectful listening at a deep level. When I met the engineer, he was discouraged, in bad health, had little energy and was near retirement. He gave all the signs of a man that had no self-respect and at the end of his professional career and personally was a failure. After major accomplishments and doing creative and productive work, he recovered his self-respect. Then I was honored at his retirement ceremony by his family for helping to save his life as husband and father. It is one of the most cherished memories and satisfying experiences in my professional career.