

Leadership is Listening

Written by Doug Kruhm

Monday, 27 April 2015 - Last Updated Monday, 27 April 2015

Leadership is responsible for making the correct decisions. To make correct decisions, the leader needs to be able to listen. The issue becomes that leaders increasingly don't have time to listen. Also they don't have the capacity to listen.

To become better leaders means to become better listeners. This isn't the listening that you typically perform. Typically, you listen to someone speak, nod your head and give them your full undivided attention. In the type of leadership listening that makes us better, we are trying to hear what people are afraid to tell us.

People are afraid of losing their jobs. So they just go along with it; whatever it is. But what we are after is active participation of team members who are emotionally involved and rewarded for correct decisions. Most people will eventually care and keep their mouth shut.

Consequently, how do you get the information you need to make good decisions? How can we allow ourselves to have access to the people we need to listen to and allow those people to have access to us?

Information gets filtered. Some people claim this isn't intentional. I disagree. I've seen first hand that information is most definitely filtered. This happens because no one wants to take the blame. Or because people, by their nature, are crabs in a barrel. They will always pull down the crab trying to climb higher.

This, of course, happens because people are so short sighted. They make decisions based on the context of their immediate surrounding and don't incorporate the greater marketplace. I remember people at Gateway Computers trying to get a position in the company all the while failing to recognize that the company itself was about to go out of business.

So how does a leader establish a system of listening? How do leaders avoid insulation from reality? Even though there is insulation built into the organization, how does a leader know when to reach beyond that insulation?

Leadership is Listening

Written by Doug Kruhm

Monday, 27 April 2015 - Last Updated Monday, 27 April 2015

Leaders are tired of hearing bad news. How can we set ourselves up for knowing what to listen to those items that we don't want to hear?

Gather the Right People

The first step in listening is to gather the right people. These people will tell you what you need to hear not what you want to hear. Good leaders know that they are not the smartest people in the room. Since we are not the smartest people in the room, we need to listen to the smartest people in the room.

Listen to Them

The second step is to listen to them. Leaders are attracted to environments where their ideas and values are heard. Ergo, leaders attract leaders. If you were in an environment where people didn't listen to your ideas, how long would you stay apart of that environment? Not very long. Why? Because no one is listening to me.

Well, hello? You are on the opposite end of that. You need to listen even when the ideas are bumping up against your own values. This attracts people to you.

The converse of this is that leaders who don't listen will eventually end up with people who have nothing helpful to say.

How to Create Listening Systems

The way to create listening systems is to get the most brightest and most strategically-minded people around the table. We need to have the flexibility to have pull in the right people to get the right information as it pertains to a specific issue.

Now there are a couple of rules with this. When this happens, always try inform the direct report that this is happening. It would sound like this, "Hi Division Head. I'm trying to make a decision about Project XYZ and I've invited Worker ABC to join in on the meeting."

Secondly, pick people who are where the action is. If something is happening in a particular

Leadership is Listening

Written by Doug Kruhm

Monday, 27 April 2015 - Last Updated Monday, 27 April 2015

office, ask the person at the front desk or people in the office where the action is happening. Don't ask the office manager. Make sure you tell the office manager that the meeting is happening and that there are no secrets go on but the meeting is with the front desk person.

3 Month and 1 Year evaluation questionnaire could be a great way to gather information as well. New people don't know any better. So when they are asked questions about their experience after being there for 3 months, they simply tell you. This allows you to view what people are thinking and it gives permission to people to speak their minds.

Then 4 times a year, have a meeting with front-line people that are willing to speak their minds. It's a listening event rather than a information sharing event.

Conclusion

What we want to hear least is what we need to hear most. To be able to hear, you have to build in listening systems into your organization to make the best decision.