



Leader Tool

Listening skills for leaders

Over the past year, it feels like we have had our people's undivided attention as we provided frequent communications on how we were responding to the everchanging situations around the pandemic. We also realised that Zoom meetings could hide all sorts of gaps with participants tuning in and out, often unnoticed. Remote working arrangements made active listening harder for leaders as the usual physical queues you get from face to face interaction were less noticeable. Still, we found ways to create opportunities to "catch up" and "check-in" regularly to overcome some of the physical barriers. The most important thing remains to ensure that your people feel heard. Here are some strategies to help improve your listening skills:

Being present in the moment: I was recently listening to a podcast where Simon Sinek explained that mindfulness is really a practice that we learn for others. When we are able to focus on just one thing, we allow thoughts to come into our minds but then label and file them away, so they don't distract us from our focus. When we use mindfulness to be present, grounded and focus on the person we are listening to it helps build a true sense they are being heard.

Listening should engage more than just your ears. Listening goes well beyond being quiet and giving someone your full attention. Posture, non-verbal cues and 'body language' of those speaking fill in the meaning behind what's being communicated. Listening means trying to find meaning in what you hear. It is not simply about concentrating on what is being said to you; it is the active pursuit of understanding. A great basic tip for improving leadership listening is to 'open up' your own body language by uncrossing your arms and placing your palms facing upward.

Listen, learn and lead. In a group situation, good leaders allow their people to speak first, ensuring that viewpoints can come out without being influenced by your views. Although you should acknowledge that you are listening, keeping neutral means that the ideas can flow.

Respect who has the floor. It's natural when people get excited, and ideas are flowing that interjecting will happen. As a leader model respectful communication so that your people will follow suit and allow all team members a chance to be heard.

Be specific. Good listeners ask good questions. What makes a good question is being specific and clear about what information you need to bridge your understanding gap. It lowers the frustration for the person who is speaking as they do not need to exert more mental energy to try and 'find the right words'.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact AccessEAP on **1800 818 728**.

