

Marilyn Manning and The Consulting Team's Leadership Tips



NOTE FROM THE CONSULTING TEAM

The last issue of Leadership Tips shared ideas and practices to improve listening. This skill affects many leadership tasks and impacts work team relationships. This issue features practices for the most common setting of modern business: the meeting.

Many important business decisions are discussed and made in meetings. It is difficult enough to be an effective listener in general conversations, let alone in a meeting situation. Agendas packed with crucial issues presented to a group with diverse opinions can make effective listening a greater challenge.

The Consulting Team is pleased to share ways we have learned from our experiences as meeting facilitators to help you increase effective listening and dialogue and decrease interruptions, misunderstandings, and disagreements.

Warm regards,
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Listening: The Secret to More Productive Meetings

"We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak."

~ Epictetus, Greek philosopher (55-135 AD)

The meeting that could have been a short review leading to a critical decision turns into a long painful discussion, with people talking past each other and pushing off the resolution to another day. Team members, wasting time and energy in discussion, are so busy making their own points, they miss that they already concur. Sound familiar? Needless conflict is one of many reasons that meetings fail.



The Consulting Team is well skilled at facilitating group dialogue, allowing the hearing and inclusion of divergent thoughts, and helping us shape a plan that can be modified as we progress.

~Patty Ruiz, HR Manager, LSA, Inc.

Simple listening practices can greatly improve discussions and results. Here are seven ways **The Consulting Team** has helped clients improve their meeting effectiveness by enhancing listening skills.

1. Planned agendas provide aids for in-meeting listening. Distributed in advance, they allow attendees the chance to prepare their thoughts and materials they want to share. Advance work can help them listen to others, knowing that they have ready responses on hand.

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2. Ground rules support better listening. When your meeting starts, suggest a few rules, such as:

There will be time for questions and concerns after each speaker; hold remarks until then.

Listen carefully; interrupt sparingly.

Honor agenda item time limits.

3. Use visuals. People sometimes find it easier to listen if they not only hear the information, but can see it as well. Visuals can be presented in several ways:

Graphs, models, and pictures: Photos and graphical representations can quickly make a complex point. They can also break up a longer presentation.

Demonstrations: This type of visual not only helps to explain a process, it can prove the validity of the speaker's point.

Key points: Share discussion points on easel sheets or handouts. Be brief. These can be distributed in advance or posted during a presentation.

4. Allow each person uninterrupted time to speak when input from all participants is needed. If meeting time is limited, assign a fair division of time between all parties. If more time is available, give permission for members to use a reasonable amount of time to present their complete response, one at a time. During the time each person has the floor, no one can interrupt or distract others from what the speaker is sharing. Even questions must be held until the speaker is finished. Native Americans used this method, holding a "talking stick" as a visual reminder that the person holding the stick was the only person to speak.

5. Take notes on your reactions, areas of confusion, and questions as a way to curb your tendency to interrupt when you listen to others. Refer to your notes to address your concerns when it's appropriate to respond.

6. Select the best listening approach after considering the meeting situation and then apply it. Your responses will be most fitting and helpful when you listen with the right approach in mind.

Personal Listening Approaches

1 - Responsive for social work-settings: *listen in a relaxed manner, seeking enjoyment and inspiration.*

2 - Understanding for work issues: *listen with no judgement; determine problems and how to resolve.*

3 - Extended for complicated relations or issues: *make sense of or organize information to understand related factors.*

4 - Insightful for problem-solving: *determine all the primary factors and important details.*

5 - Evaluation for decision-making: *evaluate all information, no matter what your personal beliefs are.*

7. Consider using a skilled facilitator if the meeting outcome is crucial and the subject contentious or complicated. A person in this role is responsible for the meeting process: keeping discussions moving, resolving any issues, clarifying questions, watching the time, and reinforcing careful listening. The meeting leader can then focus on completing the agenda content, achieving the meeting goals, and assuring that all participants have been heard.

The Consulting Team provided an appropriate balance of facilitation and freedom, direction and free-flow. Important points were identified for focus and discussion and, when things started to bog down, encouragement was used to move the effort forward.

~Chief Jeff Weaver, Sebastopol PD

The Consulting Team's Resources

Workshops and Trainings

Meeting Management: Was your last meeting the best use of everyone's time? How would your attendees have rated it? Meetings consume time, money, and energy. This workshop improves meeting effectiveness and productivity by sharing agenda planning tips, sharpening communication and facilitation skills, and helping with common group dynamics and behavior challenges.

Assertive Communications: Would you like to be more persuasive and motivating? Do you need to practice having conversations that count? This training helps participants assess their communications assertiveness. They then build skills to present a positive presence, provide clear presentations, and develop constructive conversations. Personal action plans help them apply their skills in the workplace.

Conflict and Difficult Behaviors: Do you feel confident in managing workplace conflicts? Do you want to improve your ability to deal with difficult people? In this course participants learn how to identify conflict-producing processes, behaviors, and conversations. They practice skills to resolve conflicts and strategies to create a more cooperative and productive organization.

Team Building: How well does your team face change? Does it cooperate, innovate, and achieve superior results? This workshop combines team building tips, strategies, and skills to improve members' abilities to meet the challenges they face and collaborate to deliver breakthrough performance.

Facilitation Services

The Consulting Team has years of varied experience in providing facilitation services. We are proud that 94% of our business is repeat or referral, despite our year after year growth. We specialize in strategic planning, team building, change management, and resolving conflicts that hinder organizations' progress.

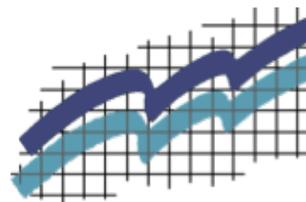
Strategic Planning: We facilitate strategic planning processes that result in focused, actionable, documented steps leading to measurable improvement and enhanced teamwork.

Team Building: We help resolve interpersonal conflict and meeting process issues, increasing teams' efficiency, collaboration, and results.

Change Management: We provide consulting services that improve essential communications and resolve issues related to organizational change.

Leadership Tips is a periodic newsletter that addresses difficult issues in today's busy and hectic work environment. For past **Leadership Tips** go to www.theconsultingteam.com and select Newsletters.

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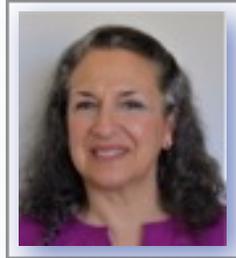


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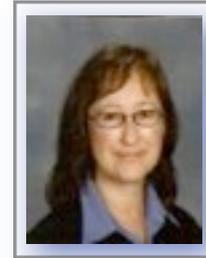
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For over 20 years The Consulting Team consultants have helped their clients solve difficult organizational and people problems. The Consulting Team, LLC, was founded by international author, speaker, and certified management consultant Dr. Marilyn Manning. The Consulting Team members are recognized experts in many areas, including communications, training, facilitation, coaching, leadership development, change, conflict mediation, strategic planning, and team building. Our success is reflected in the fact that 94% of our business is repeat or referred.

More references about meeting management and listening:

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High. K. Patterson, J. Grenny, R. McMillan, and A. Switzler, Second Edition 2012, McGraw-Hill.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. D. Stone, B. Patton, and S. Heen, 2000, Penguin Books

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