

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

The benefits of concentrating on the listener



BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

Occasionally, I have a tendency to “shoot from the hip” and give little consideration to the impact of my words. As a team lead, this quick reaction unfortunately compromises clear, concise and caring conversation. One day while doing target practice off of my hip, I realized that my thoughtlessness needed a makeover. This realization was my moment to embark upon a journey to discipline my overly active mouth.

Like most efforts to modify behavior, it’s helpful to follow a list of tips to ensure smoother travel when trying to break old habits and create new ones. The following “road map” has helped me to draw slower on the trigger by carefully analyzing my words and tone, and ultimately thinking before I speak.

Observe the Conversation

Instead of racing through a conversation, take a breath and make a commitment to listen to the other person without judgment or interruption. During this time, focus on the speaker and not on what you’re going to say. Like a sponge, focus on absorbing. The mere act of listening helps to get the full story and understand where the other person is coming from. Since the listener controls the conversation, you not only hear their words, you also get to *see* what they’re saying by watching their body language. If they cock their head or make a furrowed brow, you know that something isn’t resonating with them.



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Formulate Responses

There are many different ways to say things. Your goal is to find the best way to convey what you want to say in a manner that has a positive impact. Search for the *best* word that is clear and concise. Most importantly, choose words that fit the listener. Communication is primarily a function of the recipient so it's necessary to communicate based on the listener.

Consider the Information

Does what you want to say ultimately pass the litmus test of thoughtful communication? Is what you say *necessary, appropriate* and *timely (NAT)*? If you are responding by way of automatic pilot, it's possible your communication doesn't fit the NAT model. If not, then sit back and continue to listen. You want what you say to have impact, not just make noise.

Be Thoughtful About Your Tone

It's not only *what* you say, but *how* you say it that matters. Tone of voice can convey enthusiasm and sincerity. Similarly, it can discourage and show sarcasm. When we use the wrong tone, then what we say can be taken in the wrong way. You can test the sound of your own tone by saying, "I'm hungry" in a pleading voice. Now, say it in a shout. Did you notice how using the same words with a different tone can send two different messages?

Be an Empathetic Listener

Don't just listen to the other person with your ears and eyes—listen to them with your heart. Pour out your own intrapersonal strengths by employing kindness, gentleness and graciousness. People want to be heard. They want to be understood, respected and accepted. An empathetic listener listens attentively

to what the speaker *isn't* saying, determining what is being implied in between the lines.

Gauge the Reaction

Does the information you're going to present make a positive impact? How does the listener react? You want people to understand that you are contributing rather than detracting. While you're talking, consider what you're saying and keep a close watch on the reactions as they emerge. Be alert and be ready to adjust your behavior before the conversation spirals downward.

Observe the Conversation Again

After the conversation is over, review the whole process again in your mind and note what you might have done differently and why. This is an ongoing process. Over time, you will refine and improve. You'll become a better communicator and people will accept your responses with a more open mind.

By following these simple steps, you'll develop a keen awareness of your team in a way that is patient, thoughtful and generous. Challenge yourself today to put your full weight onto patience, thoughtfulness and selflessness by concentrating on the listener. Then get ready to reap the benefits of thinking before you speak. 🔄



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