

Listening Isn't Enough

Time for Some Clarity

For management there is an underlying assumption that they should lead. Those being led confer that status and rely on it for reassurance. Leading means that they have all the answers and of course they don't, prompting frustration and failure. That's why any good textbook says that management should listen, which is not so easy when people look to you for answers.

Listening is Often a Rote

Managers often cultivate a listening attitude. They send other people to listen for them too. All that listening often translates into little of the message getting through, in our view mainly because there is too much of it and it doesn't resonate.

Oh Hello

Gerry Robinson was the Chairman and Chief Executive of Granada. In his management career he used to do something that he called 'walking the floor'. Regularly he'd walk around and talk to whoever he bumped into. He'd disarm them with his Irish charm and ask them questions.

Ask to Listen

The whole process of asking questions, rather than just listening, means that what you hear is more resonant. It allows you to ask the questions you want to ask. It means you can go down paths of thought or fancy that listening would never have taken you to.

Answers Can Wait

Greg Dyke when he had been named Director General of the BBC, ignored the rule that in management you must make your mark in the first 100 days of your tenure. He set off on a five-month trip round the BBC asking people two questions. 'What is the one thing I should do to make things better for you' and 'What is the one thing I should do to make things better for our viewers and listeners?'

He then demonstrated that he had listened by reporting back to everyone in the BBC what he had learned and what he was going to do about it. He earned respect by asking questions to make the listening better.

Getting Your Hands Dirty

That's why we encourage our clients as part of a project to be involved in 'hands-on research' where they are asked the questions, respond to the answers and then ask more questions. Invariably, after some trepidation, they find it hugely enlightening and much more involving. Often it leads them down paths that they and we would not have imagined.

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