

C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S. inc

Working with Families in Business

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September 2007 Newsletter

“The skill of true listening is only mastered by a few.”

“What did you say?”

How do you know if someone has really heard you? Why do so many discussions end up with people getting angry, defensive and frustrated?

A major time waster for many families in business is the time needed to re-explain or defend words previously spoken. While in some of these cases it is the speaker who has done a poor job of presenting, we have found the receiver of the information has done an equally poor job of “listening to understand” the intended point of view.

While the tongue can destroy a relationship or family (refer to our August 2007 Newsletter); poor listening skills can add to the destruction. How often have we heard, “You never said that,” or “You never told me,” while others *heard* everything as the message was intended.

Why does this happen? Many times we will become, what we call, emotional listeners. We will wait to hear something we perceive to be about us and we will zero in on those statements. Everything stated before or after is either forgotten or missed. When we are in this mind-set we are mentally planning a rebuttal on one statement as we assume we already know the rest of the story so we need not listen to it. Rather than wait to hear what is really being conveyed we interrupt to interject what we think is important. By doing so, we miss the most important part of what the speaker is trying to get across. Emotional listening will cause us to be very selective in what we attend to and in how we interpret what the speaker is communicating. As an emotional listener we will also be very selective in what we retain. We will use this selective retention to defend ourselves on the points we have determined, through assumption, that pertain to us.

Studies have shown that 70% of what is heard is *filtered out*. Why? Because the listener has taken the position of an *emotional listener*! What can we do to improve the way we listen? The first step is to consciously make an individual commitment to first listen to everything that is being said. This is done by focusing all of your attention on what is being said without making assumptions. Taking notes while another person is speaking is a very good way to keep focused on the topic being discussed.

Secondly, individuals must maintain self-control during the listening process. Do not interrupt the speaker. Let the individual speaking finish their thought before you make any comments. As a result, our impulse to assume the rest of the story will give way to facts and true listening.

Another way to improve our listening skills is to avoid interpreting the words the speaker is saying. Do not begin to mentally argue with the speaker before you really understand the message. Many times we are trying to “read between the lines” of the speaker. We are looking for those things the speaker may be “hinting” about but not really saying. This can take us back into the land of assumption. Once the speaker has finished, we should begin asking questions by paraphrasing, in our own words, what we believe was said. Paraphrasing is the most effective way to be absolutely sure that we are on the same “page” as the speaker. It also lets the speaker know we are interested in accurately understanding what they have stated. Paraphrasing checks our understanding of the information being shared. This can be a positive step toward eliminating many arguments and defensive posturing. Paraphrasing will also reduce defensiveness and build trust between the listener and the speaker.

Make a conscious effort to use these techniques to *listen to understand*:
Do not interrupting the speaker
Do not assume
Take notes during the conversation
Maintain self-control
Reduce defensive posturing.

It can be accomplished even in a family business! It can begin with you and spread to others by the new example you will set. Pass this along to other family members in business. They may be looking for a way to have more effective communication too!

**Let us help your Family in Business master its
communication skills.**

~Visit our new website, designed with Family Businesses in mind~

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