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1. [Listen to lead: Silence that speaks louder](#)

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Listen to lead: Silence that speaks louder

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Body

India, Jan. 4 -- Maya goes to Rita, her boss, to seek a solution to a problem she has been facing with her team. Maya claims that the problem is causing a loss of productivity in the team. Rita is concerned and wants the problem solved. As Maya describes the problem, Rita starts to look at her phone and very soon, she has lost the plot. Once Maya finished, Rita had a general idea of what Maya was saying but had missed the details. Rita, like many **leaders**, then gives Maya some general advice on solving the problem. Maya walks away dissatisfied that her boss had not paid enough attention to her issues. Another time, Maya remembered that Rita had not allowed her to **speak** and had constantly intercepted her opinions.

Maya's experience with her boss is not unusual. Most **leaders** do not know how to **listen**, and many do not really understand the importance of **listening**. If a **leader** is asked about the importance of **listening**, it would be hard to find one **leader** who would say **listening** is not important. Yet, if I were to ask you if you had to choose between pay, providing good working conditions, well-functioning teams and **listening** as a means to impact job satisfaction (which has been shown to **lead** to better performance), which would you choose as the one that makes the most impact? If you choose pay, your choice matches that of most people.

However, based on research, **listening leads** the pack by a clear margin. There is a 13.5 times difference in the variance explained by a **leader** who **listens**, and the job satisfaction of his/her team as compared to pay and job satisfaction. A study published in 2023 that combined more than 400,000 observations and 664 effect sizes found that when followers/team members/subordinates felt that they were **listened** to, their relationship with their superior was also perceived to be positive and meaningful, and work performance improved (correlation of .36). In another study, based on more than 25,000 observations of interactions between salespersons and customers, it was found that the talk-to-**listen** ratio of 43:57, that is the customer **spoke** for more than 50% of the time, led to the highest conversion of sales calls. This then became the golden talk-to-**listen** ratio that could **lead** to higher success rates among marketers. Research from another field shows that a large number of intimate relationships failed because of a perceived lack of **listening**. Couple therapists often report that the most common problem among couples is the lack of **listening** to each other.

Let us look at the reasons why **listening** is such a powerful intervention. When **leaders listen**, they communicate that the **speaker** has control and is competent. **Listening** improves the experience of autonomy and relatedness. The need to be in control, to be seen as competent, and to belong is a set of basic needs of humans. When our basic needs are met, it is akin to having received a reward. Not only do humans feel good to be rewarded, but the rewarder is also seen positively. This positive relationship can, however, only be observed when the **listener** "**listens** to understand" and not when the **listener** "**listens** to respond". Unfortunately, most **listeners** do the latter, that is **listen** to respond, fix, and tell the other person what they should do. Such **listening** satisfies the "need to influence" of the **listener** rather than meeting the basic needs of the **speaker**.

Listen to lead: Silence that speaks louder

Leaders who **listen** also ask better questions that help people to look for the answers they need to solve their own problems. **Leaders** who **listen** also help the team to accept responsibility for their actions because they are more likely to have come up with the choice of action. **Leaders** who **listen** are those who are also more easily able to accept and say to the team, "I don't know", and thus spur the team to work on finding the appropriate solution.

Listening is not merely a good thing to do, it is a necessity. **Listening** does not cost much and when done well it does not have many negative side effects. However, if I said **listening** is easy, it would not be true. While it is a skill that we all have access to if our ears are functioning well, to be competent as a **listener** requires intentionality and practice. Just like you do not become a good **speaker** because you can **speak**, you do not become a good **listener** because you can **listen**. **Listening** creates impact, helps build relationships, needs the **listener** to be mindful, communicates to the **speaker** that the **listener** is interested, is open, non-judgmental, comprehends what is being said and understands the expectations of the **speaker**. Such **listening** requires mindfulness and intentional practice until it becomes a habit.

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