

Listening Skills in Management

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ABSTRACT

The ability to be an active listener is too often taken for granted. However the same cannot be considered for a Human Resource Personnel. HR professionals play pivotal role in the organization. They inject a feeling of confidence and belief among the staff members by listening and solving their issues and concerns. Employee grievances are essentially human problems, real or imaginary. Whatever be the cause, the approach of HR professional should be humane. The grievance handling is a kind of procedure that values the idea and participation of the employees' but often taken as a negative factor within the organizations. The best possible solution that can be implemented to ensure grievances to be resolved is to provide individuals and groups the capacity to be heard and their interests should be communicated upward. To accomplish this, excellent listening skills are required for 'getting into' the griever's head in order to understand the grievance from his point of view. So as to assure fair treatment to griever and sustain loyalty and commitment, Pseudo Listening should be replaced by Active Listening. Active Listening becomes the best way to learn about the actual requirements, expectations and desires of the working staff. If the HR professional is not an active listener, the collision and clash of ideas might turn into arguments and disputes. In order to bring back the harmony inside the organization, the management should be engaged in handling the different faces of issues to maintain healthy environment and employee relation.

Keywords: Listening Skills, Grievance Handling, Attrition, Retention, Lay-Off, and Pseudo Listening.

I. INTRODUCTION

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them. — **Ralph Nichols**

It is said, "We have been given two ears but one single mouth, in order that we may listen more and talk less." Practically, however, only half of our communication is spent in listening. Since people take listening skills for granted, many interpersonal communication problems develop. The process of Listening involves hearing the speakers words, understanding the message and its importance to the speaker, and communicating that understanding to the speaker. Of all the communication skills, listening is the earliest learned and the most frequently used, yet it seems to be the least mastered. It is the key to developing and maintaining relationships, decision making and problem solving. This research project uses descriptive methodology to investigate the relationship between effective listening and grievance handling. Listening requires us to understand that our staff is important. All systems are slightly different in how they separate listeners but all offer a continuum from non-listeners to very sharp listeners for solving a grievance. Human resource managers are often seen as playing a largely administrative role in their organizations, occupying staff positions that deal with traditional functions and grievance handling.

HR leaders understand that communication is inevitable to professional success. It is almost impossible to be productive in today's business environment without being an effective communicator. Most HR professionals are accomplished in the art of interpersonal communication. However HR professionals who help set organizational strategy know they must communicate effectively and listen effectively to all departments and business units within an organization.

Effective human resource policies should handle the grievances through effective listening which causes minimum loss to either the employee or the company. Listening should be fair tending the complaint and foster a positive environment which is suitable for not only the firm's growth but also individual's professional and most importantly mental growth. Maintaining a positive rapport with the employee is the key to relationship building and can be easily accomplished through effective listening. The effective listener makes transitions smoothly from speaker to listener and

back to speaker. From a listening perspective, this means concentrating on what a speaker has to say and practicing not thinking about what you're going to say as soon as you get a chance.

II. ADDRESSING GRIEVANCES BY ACTIVE LISTENING

It is particularly important when the speaker expresses strong feelings. The neutral technique encourages the speaker to continue talking. A simple nod of the head or "uh-huh" is usually effective signals that we are interested and listening. This involves combining the speaker's thoughts into a concise statement which focuses on the speaker's key points. Many people possess negative attitudes toward listening. To them, listening is a passive, compliant act. This is usually considered to be the most obstinate barrier to effective listening. We believe that talk is power; when we have "the floor" we are in control. Ironically, the reverse is the truth. True power is in listening. So the ideal workplace for any working professional is the one wherein each one is leading an existence devoid of any challenges, think again. The need to implement mechanisms and policies, in an endeavor to address employee grievances.

It is a known fact that any organization will have its share of issues and grievances put forth by its employees to address and no organization can escape that. However, many organizations today are making serious efforts to ensure these employee grievances are dealt with tactfully and their grievances are actively listened to. But, to what extent are the grievances addressed, remains to be different in every firm and depends on various factors. From a review of literature on active listening, we can identify eight specific behaviors that effective active listeners demonstrate.

The active listener concentrates intensely on what the speaker is saying and tunes out the thousands of miscellaneous thoughts that create distractions.

Empathy requires understanding what the speaker wants to communicate rather than what you want to understand. The challenge for the active listener is to absorb what's being said and to withhold judgment of content until the speaker is finished.

The final ingredient of active listening is taking responsibility for completeness. Developing effective active Listening Skills requires eye contact, exhibiting affirmative nods and appropriate facial expressions, avoiding distracting actions or gestures, asking questions, avoiding interrupting the speaker, and finally not over talking.

Make sure that the Human Resource Managers redressing to the complaint of an employee has a separate meeting place where the employee can speak out his mind clearly and openly. Apart from listening to the issue, the HR Manager should also have enough time to contemplate on the problem. Communicating about the issue in an in-depth way can help avoid misinterpretation and will foster openness in communication to explain the issue better and their expectations.

Encourage the complainant to express his problem without running down any streak of judgment or preconceived notions about them. Always strive to solve the issue in a peaceful manner, without causing disruptions or negativity in the environment. A Human Resource Manager should throughout the span of the meeting maintain a stature which suggests calmness and coolness through active listening.

Keep in mind the apprehension of the employee as against the effects of the issue of reporting a problem. Keep in mind the key points of the issue and work on that very spot to ensure correction. A HR Manager should not just keep his ears open, but also listen to the grievance with an open mind and react with sensitivity. Try to make the complainant feel better by reducing the focus on the prime reason causing anxiety and stress.

A complainant should be well convinced that the HR Manager will act without any biases and resolve the problem in the interest of the employee. A good HR Manager should never indulge in the leveling game with employees, as if he heard the plight of the distressed once, then try to level it up by imposing a regulation on the employee that is in the interest of the firm. Never use words that suggest an idea of delay or a 'let's see sound'. Give clear responses and act on the situation without leaving the situation hung up in the middle of nowhere. Never say 'the matter shall be looked into' or 'you will be reported.'

A HR Manager should keep the matters confidential. Both the person reporting a problem, and the problem reported towards the accused, should be given due chance to speak and present their own defensive statements. There should be enough evidence on the issue reported, and therefore must not just sway into the words, but have something to cross-check and validate the genuineness of the problem.

Employee grievances are essentially human problems, real or imaginary. Whatever be the cause, the approach should be humane. Sensitivity and empathy are required in handling grievances diligently and they need to be handled with care. There is no definite formula or a single way in this regard yet one can try out certain tested measures: Firstly, employee grievances have to be handled promptly. An aggrieved employee suffers from a sense of injustice being done

to him or her. Recall the adage, 'Justice delayed is justice denied'. The need to handle grievances promptly cannot be over-emphasized. In many cases, trivial issues concerning one or a few employees become collective issues and are blown out of proportion causing avoidable loss and bitterness, because they were not dealt with properly and promptly and they were handled through pseudo-listening. Secondly, employee grievances will have to be settled at the level at which they occur in order to avoid the feeling of injustice at the interacting group level. If an employee has a grievance, with or about a supervisor and if it is redressed not at the concerned supervisor's level but one or two levels above him or her, the employee continues to be dissatisfied about the supervisor because he or she has not been able to resolve it because the problem was not listened to effectively. In the process, supervisory authority gets eroded. Hence, it is important to have the grievances settled, preferably at the level at which they occur. Thirdly, when grievances occur, it is important to record them as to make sure that they do not recur. If more grievances occur over the same issue, time and again and more numbers of employees are found to have a similar grievance, the focus should shift from person and (grievance) procedure to policy and practices.

At the evaluative listening level, the listener is actively trying to hear what the speaker is saying, but isn't making an effort to understand the intent. They tend to be a more logical listener, who is more concerned with content than feelings. The evaluative listener forms opinions about the speaker's words even before the message is complete and risks not understanding the true meaning of the message. This obviously leads to tense behavior and deterioration of the trust bond.

Active listening requires that we listen not only for the content of the speaker's message, but more importantly, for the intent and feeling of the message as well. The active listener shows the listener, both verbally and non-verbally that they are truly interested and listening.

When the listener hears the sounds and words but not really listen then this type is a superficial listener, staying on the surface of the problem, never going deeper. Problems are postponed to the future rather than dealing with them in the present. They prefer to evade difficult or technical presentations, and when they do listen, they tend to focus on the bottom line, the fact, rather than the main ideas. Marginal listening is extremely dangerous, because there is enormous room for misunderstanding when they only superficially concentrate on what is being said.

Other simple but often overlooked reasons for failing to listen effectively are fairly obvious. Many times we are too busy talking, preoccupied, or distracted to listen. Sometimes we are too tired or, unfortunately, too lazy to listen. Listening is hard work and requires concentration. Most often, however, the research shows that we don't listen because of our faulty listening habits. Reflective Listening Skills are extremely important.

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening habits are as bad as many people's are, then there's a lot of habit-breaking to do. Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message.

Start using active listening to become a better communicator, improve your workplace productivity, and develop better relationships. To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what he or she is saying.

Whether one is the sender or the receiver--manager or employee--active listening is essential in the workplace. Although listening may appear to be passive, it is not. In fact, active listening demonstrates respect for the speaker. It also requires responsibility on the part of the listener to hear the message as well as the underlying feeling or attitude. Active listening also means being aware of different kinds of communication, such as body language, posture, hand and eye movements, facial expressions, and even breathing. In the workplace, active listening can improve productivity, confidence and employee morale.

CONCLUSION

Good listening skills generally follow directions correctly they are given this means they spend more time on task. Active listening skills enable to use their time more wisely. They don't have to spend as much time asking questions, clarifying information or fixing mistakes made as a result of passive listening. Active listeners tend to have more successful interpersonal relationships. Their active attention supports the speaker and helps build his confidence. By encouraging feelings of respect, active listeners have the ability to persuade and successfully negotiate. Therefore, good listeners are able to initiate a resolution to the misunderstanding more readily. The apparent problem is, of all the communication skills, listening is the earliest learned and the most frequently used, yet it seems to be the least mastered.

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