

Reducing Conflict 26 Listen More Than You Speak

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



To reduce conflict in any organization, plan to listen more than you speak. The ancient Greek Philosopher, Epictetus said. “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

When you are in conflict with another individual, it is human nature to advocate for your side of the argument. Usually, that involves doing a lot of

talking.

You Don't Hear Well When You Are Talking

The problem is that when you are talking it dramatically reduces your ability to understand the other person's perspective. Your mind becomes preoccupied with selling your version of the issue.

The irony is that in order to reduce or resolve the conflict, both parties need to understand both sides of the issue thoroughly. That makes it imperative that you listen more than you speak when in conflict.

Few people are actually capable of behaving in that way, so conflicts drag on and deepen in most cases. If you can remember this simple logic to close your mouth and open your ears you will find there is less conflict in your life.

Reversing Roles Can Help

Sometimes it can help to reverse the roles so that you advocate for the points your opponent makes. I have written on that topic in [another article](#), and there is a huge caveat with this method. Both people must play the game with integrity. If one person tries to manipulate the other while reversing roles, the technique can have very negative consequences.

Buy Yourself a Listening Hat

Have an imaginary listening hat that you figuratively put on when you are having a discussion with a highly emotional or agitated individual. The hat will remind you to amp up your listening focus. When most people are “listening,” what they are actually focusing on is preparing to speak. The cure is to use reflective listening.

Use Reflective Listening

The technique of reflective listening is not new, but it is extremely powerful at helping you understand the points the other person is making. The technique has three steps as follows:

1. Attend to the other person. In other words, eliminate distractions.
2. Listen with much higher intensity than you normally do.
3. Interject comments as appropriate to indicate that you understand.

It is vital to understand how to reflect back in a way that is helpful and not obvious. You should avoid just parroting the same words back to the other person. Try to interject a gesture or question that will indicate you are following the other person's meaning without being redundant. Just a few reflections will give the feeling of following the conversation. If you use too many reflections or make them clumsy, then your attempt to improve rapport will backfire.

The technique of reflective listening takes too much energy to use it in casual conversation. That is where the Listening Hat idea is so helpful. When you encounter a situation where the other person is emotional or highly worked up, that is the time to put on the hat and listen with greater care.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to improve your listening skills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBPbfFReicw>

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