

Lead By Listening

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After a lot of hard work, you have been made the leader of your team or your organization. And now, as a leader, you are anxious to start performing.

First, there is a level of excitement and then the pressure is on – to not only lead, but to lead well. What lessons have you learned along the way to get here? What leaders inspired you?

At those moments there's a natural tendency to immediately start forging ahead – after all, you are all up to speed on the organization/team, vision, plan, and now, the strategies and tactics that will be needed to move forward.

And that tendency can easily lead to believing the thought, "Since I know the way and I can just push forward, my teammates will just follow me, and they'll figure it out."

There is however another voice as well. It's the voice that says, "Wait, slow down. Is everyone on team in alignment to what is happening?"

When that voice speaks, the best response is to lead by listening.

People and organizations cannot move forward without being heard. The phrase lead by listening is very important – its representative of the one thing a leader has to do before they push forward.

Alignment – of vision, of plan, of strategy, of tactics, of metrics, roles and responsibilities – all of it can only happen if we listen first.

And it is not just listening to your immediate reports – the listening has to go all the way down the line, to every employee.

Listening is not a leadership assumption, as the impatient parts of our brain may love to think. It doesn't happen without effort.

A leader must take the time to make this happen, the old-fashioned way – person by person, meeting by meeting, and conversation by conversation.

A good leader listens first before becoming a teacher who prepares his or her students, and then a coach, making sure everyone is ready to move forward.

Listening is a culture that may feel new, but it is critical for visioning and taking action. What's happening now and where do you want to go are questions leaders need to ask and listen for answers. What is the company mantra that people are saying?

Serve your organization and team by asking key questions. Serve yourself by listening to the answers.

They are ready for you to lead.

And now, so are you, as you have listened to those around you. You are really ready to move forward.

Don't succumb to that pressure to race ahead and get a lot of tasks completed before you take time to listen.

That way, you'll never have to look behind you as you climb upward and bring others with you.

Lead well by listening!

Mary Anne