

Sounds of Silence

By Carol Gegner

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"A wise old owl sat on an oak; the more he saw the less he spoke; the less he spoke the more he heard; why aren't we like that wise old bird?" This delightful quote is from Edward Hersey Richards. We can learn many lessons from the wise old owl if we are willing to stop, look and listen.

First we need to stop long enough to become more aware of what we are doing and the impact it has on others. Second, we need to look at others and ourselves from a new perspective. Lastly, we need to listen to more than we talk.

Let's put our attention on the importance of listening. Listening is a skill we can master to become more successful in business and life. Stephen Covey tells us highly effective people seek first to understand then be understood. Seeking to understand requires good listening skills.

Poor listening skills can cost companies hundreds of thousands of dollars if information is misunderstood. Just look at the emotional costs of divorces, broken friendships and the estrangement of family members often created because no one takes the time to really listen. It seems everyone wants to be understood before they understand.

The truth of the matter is most of us think we are great listeners. How do you know when you aren't really listening? Are you already thinking of a response while the person is still talking? Are you making a mental grocery list? Do you interrupt others? Remember you can't speak and listen at the same time.

Do you jump to conclusions and solve the problem before all the facts are given? Are you multitasking while someone is talking to you? If so, you are perceived as not listening whether you think you really are or not.

Listening is really an art. What are the benefits of listening to others? It makes them feel important because you take the time to try to understand them. One of my colleagues works for an organization where senior management actually listens to ideas from front line employees and implements change based on those ideas. Those employees feel respected by management. Wouldn't it be great if more organizations followed that model?

When you want to promote understanding, build strong connections, increase sales, have more effective meetings, improve retention and raise morale try being like the wise old owl. Just open your

eyes and close your mouth so you can listen.

Imagine the possibilities of using those techniques at home with your teenage children or spouse. Let them know in advance you are trying to become a better listener or they may think you are on some mind-altering medication! When you listen to others they will begin to listen to you.

Don't forget the importance of listening to yourself. How else can you tap into your wisdom? Last weekend was my annual retreat to a Zen center. Every year I go there I am reminded of the importance of quieting the mind and slowing down the body to nurture the soul.

Many of you do that daily with your meditation. Getting rid of the mental din and chatter gives you the opportunity to listen to your inner spirit. What a great gift you give to yourself!

Listening requires the sound of silence. Use it well and enjoy the benefits.

Check out Keys to Success, a FREE monthly ezine dedicated to professionals, business owners, and organizations who want to excel. Keys to Success is published by Carol Gegner. For more information send an email to carol@coachexecs.com or go to <http://www.coachexecs.com> . You can also subscribe by email to Keys_to_Success-On@lists.webvalence.com.

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