

Do you listen ... or wait to talk?

Most leaders acknowledge the importance of listening. But few know how to do it well.

Listening raptly requires more than keeping quiet and maintaining eye contact with the speaker. You need to signal that you're intent on understanding what you hear—and retaining it. Here's how:

✓ **Invite speakers to elaborate.** Just because someone finishes a sentence and hesitates to say more doesn't mean you should jump in and fill the silence. Pause a few seconds to see if the person wishes to add anything. If not, say, "Please go on" or "Tell me more about that."

✓ **Dig to clarify what you hear.** If you hear a term that you don't understand, say so. Ask, "What does that mean?" When speakers explain an acronym, slang expression or other word or phrase that's unfamiliar to you, they feel affirmed.

✓ **Hold up a mirror.** Recognize a speaker's feelings. Use phrases such as, "I get that you're angry about this" or "Boy, you've sure faced your share of difficulties lately." These statements give permission for speakers to reveal more of themselves, which in turn enables you to keep learning from them.

✓ **Share how you'd react.** If you make others feel normal, they're more apt to speak more openly and honestly to you. Look for opportunities to say, "I'd do the same thing" or "I'd probably react similarly." Indicating your acceptance paves the way for people to confide in you more deeply.

— Adapted from *Resolving Conflicts at Work*, Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith, Jossey-Bass.