

Practice the four R's of 'power listening'

There's power in listening. When you know how to do it, listening can greatly reduce the number of unpleasant surprises in your work. It can give you a steady stream of the sort of information you must have to do your job well. And when you actively listen to what your employees tell you, you make fewer mistakes, and they make fewer mistakes. Your people know you care, and management knows it too. Everybody wins.

At the same time, power listening is a process that few people have actually mastered. It takes work. You can't fake attention, get wrapped up in your own thoughts, jump to conclusions, or fill in the blanks for the speaker. Power listening is listening with empathy, putting yourself in the other person's shoes, and responding with what you understand the other person has said. The best way to become a power listener is to develop the specific skills of active listening, especially the "four R's":

- **Repeat.** Simply repeat back what you heard the speaker say — as you would if someone gave you a phone number you need to remember. It's harder than it may seem to exactly repeat what you've heard without elaboration or judgment — that's why the game of "telephone" works. It does take practice.
- **Rephrase.** This is what people usually do — repeat what they've been told, in their own words. Again, it's important not to judge or offer opinions, but you can check your understanding by paraphrasing and highlighting what you think is important to the speaker.
- **Reflect feelings.** Listen for, and acknowledge, the speaker's feelings. A great deal of what we call "charisma" is this kind of empathy; people who practice it can quickly build bonds and open up communication with almost anyone.
- **Request information.** Ask "what" or "how" questions that invite the speaker to tell more. This is the only time good power listeners say anything that doesn't echo the speaker. There's no room in power listening for offering your own opinions, judging the speaker's feelings or motives, or changing the subject to what you think is most important. Power listeners don't give advice or tell "me too" stories. Instead, they offer a fair hearing, full understanding, and firm support.