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DEAR CHIEF: I received my annual performance review last week and was told I’m not a good listener and therefore won’t make a good leader. I asked my boss for clarification and he told me I constantly talk about myself too much, denying others much of a chance to say anything. I don’t know. I don’t think I’m as bad as he indicates. How can I really tell if I’m a bad listener?

BAD LISTENER



DEAR BAD LISTENER: Your boss is right about one thing: if someone isn’t a good listener, they’re probably not a good leader either. There were many times when I intentionally avoided certain people because all they did was talk about themselves. It didn’t matter what the topic of conversation was, they always navigated the conversation to be about them. People who do this are typically self-centered and don’t even realize it--and they are often bad decision makers.

One thing I’ve realized from my leadership experience is that when I listened to others more attentively, they were more inclined to cooperate with me in accomplishing objectives. I also noticed that whenever I spoke with someone who gave me their undivided attention, I usually walked away feeling like they were a really wise person.

Leaders who are good listeners gain

Listen, learn, and lead

informal power over others. Why? Because people generally appreciate leaders who listen to them and this appreciation often results in higher degrees of loyalty, respect, admiration, and cooperation.

Additionally, if you’re a leader who needs to solve problems, you definitely should listen to people when they discuss topics or make suggestions. Meg Whitman, founder of eBay said, “Listen. Listen. Listen. You will learn what people think the problem is, and maybe you’ll learn what the solution is.”

According to global leadership expert Sheila Murray Bethel, here’s how you can determine if you’re a good listener or not. Answer the following questions:

1) Do you like to listen to other people talk? 2) Do you encourage other people to talk? 3) Do you listen even if you do not like the person who is talking? 4) Do you listen equally well whether the person is a man or woman, young or old? 5) Do you listen equally well to a friend, acquaintance, or stranger? 6) Do you put what you have been doing out of sight and out of mind? 7) Do you look at the person talking to you? 8) Do you ignore distractions around you? 9) Do you smile, nod your head, and otherwise encourage the person to talk? 10) Do you think about what the person is saying? 11) Do you try to understand what the person means? 12) Do you try to understand why he is saying it? 13) Do you let the person finish what he is saying? 14) If he hesitates, do you

encourage him to go on? 15) Do you restate what he has said and ask him if you got it right? 16) Do you withhold judgment about his ideas until he has finished? 17) Do you listen regardless of the person’s manner of speaking and choice of words? 18) Do you listen even though you anticipate what the person is going to say? 19) Would your followers describe you as a good listener?

When you have examined these questions, have someone you trust answer them about your listening habits as well. Compare your answers to theirs. If some (or many) of the answers were “no,” then it’s time to change your listening attitude and behavior. This assessment could be an important step to enhancing your wise use of power through better listening habits.

When you’re talking with someone, focus every ounce of your attention on them. During that time, make them feel like they’re the most important person in the world. Create a space around them that others back away from and won’t breach. If you do these things, your interactions with others will become more effective and fulfilling, and your boss will have a different opinion about your leadership potential.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.