

## Be a good listener

**W**e spend a lot of time in school learning how to “communicate” and “express ourselves.”

But who learns how to listen?

Listening is a crucial skill for any manager, especially if you want to manage by coaching.

If you’ve set up a meeting/conversation ahead of time, be sure to do your homework before your employee arrives. If you need to, check the personnel file, make a phone call or two, anticipate the points you need to cover—whatever it takes to be ready.

When your employee arrives, drop everything and give them your complete attention.

Maintain eye contact. You’ll convey your interest and sincerity, and you can also pick up a lot of information about how your employees are feeling and how much they’re understanding.

Hear them out before you respond. If you find yourself thinking “I know what you’re going to say,”

you can be pretty sure you don't. Be patient. Stay focused. And resist the temptation to interrupt.

Don't ignore emotions. Acknowledge and verify them. "You sound angry, Ted. Tell me about it."

Allow for silence—but don't use it as a weapon. Silence can be intimidating, but a pause that allows for reflection shows respect and lets your employee give an accurate response, rather than one that's simply fast.

Here are the 3 Rs of effective listening:

**Receive:** To understand it, you have to hear it. Be still. Wait. Don't assume. Take notes if you need to. Probe gently. Concentrate on what you're hearing (and not on what you have to do or say next).

**Reflect:** Think about what you're hearing. Make sense out of it. Put it into a meaningful context. Ask questions if you need to. Listening is active!

**Rephrase:** Bounce what you think you're hearing back to the source. Put it in your own words to make sure you understand it and that you've got it right. Give your employee a chance to clarify.

**“Effective listening is simply a means to an end. Once you’ve heard and understood, you must respond. If you think the employee is wrong, say so. If you don’t respond, employees will soon stop talking.”**