

The Total Leader®

Provided by Leadership Management® International, Inc.

4567 Lake Shore Drive, Waco, TX 76710, (800)568-1241, Email: info@lmi-usa.com, www.lmi-world.com

Identify and Prevent Listening Barriers

Anything that hampers listening sets up barriers that prevent understanding and closes the door to the ultimate goal of communication – producing constructive action. Barriers to listening are found in physical situations, in attitudes, and in behavior. Awareness of barriers allows you to take appropriate action to keep the door to communication open.

Physical Barriers

Environmental barriers are the easiest to overcome. You can close a door to reduce distracting noise. You can schedule a conversation at a time when interruption can be controlled. You can arrange to be in a comfortable physical environment before attempting an important communication session.

Perhaps the most difficult physical barrier to overcome is the rate of speed with which the human mind thinks. Average conversation proceeds at approximately 125 words a minute – less if the information is complex. But you can think at a rate of 400 to 600 words a minute. The listener's brain has quite a bit of leisure time available; as a result, the mind of the listener may take a side trip and fail to get back on track in time to capture information being presented. The

speed at which the brain generally processes information presents a significant physical concentration and attention barrier.

Two excellent tools are available to overcome this physical barrier and focus the brain's processing power:

- *Organizing*. Everyone whose work involves more than one basic task is accustomed to organizing activities, ideas, and objects. Apply this same skill to listening. Mentally organize what you hear as you listen. Follow the speaker's logic, taking notes if that helps your concentration.

- *Analyzing*. As you listen, analyze the ideas you hear.

Compare them with information you already know; look for logical cause and effect relationships.

Attitude Barriers

Attitudes that block communication are often easily detected, but sometimes they are not all that apparent. Sometimes it is possible just to look at certain people and tell that they are only pretending to listen, or that they feel no real concern for the topic. In contrast, some people convincingly pretend to be interested when they actually have already made up their minds and are closed



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– continued on page 2 –

—continued from page 1—

to new ideas. Other similar attitudes lead to tuning out the speaker, discounting the worth of a speaker on the basis of appearance, voice, or other external attributes.

One of the most prevalent attitude barriers in communication is selective listening. Because we would like to hear only what pleases us or fits into our preconceived plans and ideas, it is easy to discount or filter out messages we find unpleasant or disagreeable.

Because selective listening is so devastating to relationships, become aware of any areas in which you practice it. Devise a plan for changing your attitude and, as a result, your behavior.

An attitude barrier that is just as devastating as selective listening is overreacting. Making snap judgments, losing control of emotions, and other inappropriate reactions — especially when they occur before the entire message has been delivered — destroy any hopes to mutual understanding and cooperation.

The best tools for overcoming attitude barriers to communication are a strong, secure self-image and a belief in the worth of other people. Recognize that communication is more than sending; it is also receiving. Explore strategies for strengthening your self-esteem, and put them into practice. Decide to treat others with respect in spite of what they may say, think, or do. Demonstrate genuine empathy in all your interpersonal relationships. These commitments promote understanding and result in constructive action.

Behavior Barriers

Behaviors that reduce the power of communication include both verbal and nonverbal actions that cut off listening. One of the most frequently observed listening barriers is interrupting the speaker. When people interrupt the speaker, their actions may be perceived as lack of understanding, impoliteness, or rejection.

Other verbal barriers to listening include criticizing and attempting to control. Habitual critics stop the flow of creative ideas from others. Nonstop talkers and those who attempt to manipulate or control other people and situations send the message that they consider communication as one-way — from them to everyone else. They do not stop to ask themselves or others, “What do I need to know?”

Nonverbal behavior barriers to listening are often seen in the posture. Slumping down in a chair, avoiding eye contact, obvious preoccupation with other matters, and nervous handling of objects all telegraph the message, “I’m not listening and you can’t make me.”

Actively Listening

Effective listening is active, not passive. Listening demands conscious activity and concentration; it is more than maintaining a polite silence while mentally rehearsing what to say at the speaker’s next breath or silently searching for flaws in the speaker’s ideas that you can attack. Like any important skill, effective listening requires adequate preparation, careful execution, and continual monitoring. This means that preparation for good listening begins with adopting certain attitudes that support effective listening.

One of the basic attitudes for listening is readiness to learn or understand. Closely allied is willingness to learn from a particular source. Those who believe they already know everything of importance are functionally unable to listen.

A second important attitude for listening is belief in the value of others as individuals and in the possibility that they have ideas and information worth hearing. This attitude is expressed through empathy — the ability to communicate that you value other people even when you do not necessarily agree with or condone their attitudes and actions. Empathy is the ability to understand what people feel, to acknowledge their right to feel it, and to communicate for win-win solutions even though you differ.

Listening also is being alert not only to the actual words spoken, but also to what is not being said. Listening is being acutely aware of the attitudes of others, their viewpoints, their body language, and their emotional states.

Fortunately, listening is a skill that can be learned. Listening opens the gateway to personal and professional success through the vast dividends it pays. Listening does the following:

- Keeps communication channels open
- Provides opportunities for learning
- Enhances relationships
- Increases productivity by saving time and effort
- Reduces friction, misunderstandings, and conflicts
- Alerts you to opportunities
- Enlists the support and favorable responses of others
- Enables you to reach professional and personal goals
- Develops insight into people’s needs and desires so you can communicate better.

Everybody wants to be appreciated. Listening is one of the highest forms of appreciation anyone can show another person. Listening and trying to understand the other person’s point of view develops rapport and trust. When people feel appreciated, when they sense an attitude of respect, and when they know that others are trying to understand their situation and how they view it, then they tend to reflect these same attitudes of appreciation and respect. This, in turn, fosters mutual understanding and cooperation, both essential for reaching professional and business goals.

Move Forward with Expectancy

Positive expectancy begins with a sense of self-awareness that banishes confusion by defining the goals you want to achieve. Self-awareness gives you a track to run on. It makes you predictable and reliable. It allows you to use your talents and energies in the full expression of your potential.

Positive expectancy requires a no-limitations belief in yourself that comes from clear, calm and honest self-confidence. Belief in yourself rests on supreme confidence in both your present and future abilities. It demands that you be goal directed and progressively growing.

Positive expectancy is also developed through self-acceptance. Choosing to accept yourself as you really are — your strengths and your weaknesses, your assets and liabilities — is the most vital and important decision you will ever make. Self-acceptance frees you from guilt and discouragement and gives you the energy to grow and use more of your potential.

Table of Contents

Page 1-2: **PERSONAL SUCCESS**
Identify and Prevent Listening Barriers

Page 3: **STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP**
Master Motivation Blocks

Page 4: **CLARIFYING FOCUS**
Remain Calm During an Emergency

Pag 5: **GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**
What Areas Influence Your Leadership?

Page 6: **STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**
Bridging the Gap Between Potential and Performance

Master Motivation Blocks

As you grow in personal leadership, the excitement you experience in achieving new goals is so fulfilling that you will never want to give up the rewards of this way of life. The gratification you receive from exercising personal leadership makes it hard to believe that it would be possible to live any other way. But new habits and attitudes require alert monitoring to insure their continuity. Old habits and attitudes still lurk in the recesses of your subconscious and will reassert themselves if you are not vigilant. Two motivation blocks that stem the natural tide of creativity are so frequently encountered that it is good to have a plan in advance for dealing with them should they occur.



Negative habit patterns. Negative habit patterns arising from negative thinking often cause a motivation block. Some children grow up in an atmosphere where every suggestion or request is met with an automatic negative response. As a result, it becomes natural to concentrate on why things cannot be done instead of how they can be done. The result is procrastination or making excuses. Remember that there is always the danger of unconsciously slipping back into the habit of thinking negatively and blaming circumstances for lack of progress. Remain constantly aware of how you respond to suggestions, ideas, and new experiences. If you realize that you are responding negatively, let this awareness strike the emotional cords needed for making the desired personality changes instead of acting as a motivation block. Set up a strong program of affirmation and you will gradually replace negative habit patterns by substitution. As your new attitudes grow stronger, they dominate your pattern of thinking and the old negative responses gradually subside. Success is the inevitable result. Associate primarily with people who think and live positively. Read material that feeds your mind with positive ideas. Listen to personal development and self-improvement CDs or webinars. The real key to growth is confidence and belief in your ability to change yourself and your attitudes.

Reliving past failures. The second serious motivation block often encountered is the practice of reliving past failures. Failure is relatively unimportant. History's greatest progress has been achieved through trial and error by individuals who dared to fail and try again. Failure is tragic only when it is allowed to create a motivation block to future effort — when it becomes so emotionally laden with embarrassment, fear, or doubt that it affects the total personality. Mistakes are neither blemishes on your record nor indications of weakness. As you develop personal leadership, you learn to view mistakes as an inevitable part of life, an opportunity for growth, and a part of the process of maturing. You can actually enjoy analyzing a mistake to find all of its potential good. It then becomes a victory and an opportunity for growth. Face life realistically and without fear; refuse to deny life, to shrink or hide from it.

These two motivation blocks to personal leadership are most quickly overcome through the practice of goal setting. If you know where you stand and where you are going, you can quickly destroy the effect of either of these motivation blocks because you have already fashioned the necessary tools in your plan of action. The combination of challenging goals, a vigorous program of affirmation, and the ongoing practice of visualization give you quick mastery over motivation blocks.

Remain Calm During an Emergency

The most productive individuals are those who master the art of taking care of emergency situations, unexpected and unplanned, that require immediate attention to prevent serious consequences. “Fire fighting” is the usual term for handling a crisis. “Fire fighting” ranges from such relatively simple problems as soothing an unhappy customer to solving a major emergency production or personnel problem.

Obviously, true emergencies must be handled immediately. This often means pushing aside planned activities and rearranging schedules to take care of the emergency.

The ideal, of course, is to prevent emergencies. If you suspect you are spending too much time “fire fighting,” keep notes over a period of a week or a month describing the various situations that require emergency action. Identify the location of the fire and what is lost. Who is the arsonist? Who is usually the fire fighter? Is some kind of psychological reward being sought by either arsonist or fire fighter – or both? List the causes, the actions taken, and the results for each crisis handled. Then compare the circumstances to find any pattern that exists. Decide how you can best prevent future crises. Consider instituting necessary training, giving appropriate feedback, setting up proper controls, or delegating appropriate responsibility. Design new procedures, perform necessary maintenance, or install new equipment – whatever your analysis indicates is needed.

Even the best planning and training fail to prevent an occasional unanticipated situation that must be handled on the spot. When vital machinery breaks down, key people are sick or hurt, or outside circumstances affect your work, adjustments must be made. When a crisis occurs, minimize lost time by following these suggestions:

- ◆ *Stay calm.* The existence of a crisis implies that something is out of normal control. If, in addition, you lose control of your emotions, it becomes difficult to make rational decisions that meet the needs of the moment. Tell yourself, “I’ve solved harder problems under pressure. I can solve this one, too.” Your calm, matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation and the assumption that it can be

handled keep both you and other people calm and able to bring the situation back under control.

- ◆ *Isolate the major consideration.* When a crisis arises, something will probably be lost as a result of the situation – either time, money, or materials. Decide what loss can be tolerated and what loss must be avoided. Isolate the root problem so you can immediately respond to the real issue. Your objective is to solve the problem and regain control without a critical loss.

For example, perhaps a breakdown occurs that will cause a delay in the production of a component needed to fill an important order. You realize that a time delay would represent a substantial loss for this important client. Failure to meet your obligations to this customer

is a loss you cannot afford. You would be well advised, therefore, to authorize overtime for repairs and production, or to shift the critical component to another production line and delay work on a less critical job.

- ◆ *Return conditions to normal as soon as possible.* The objective in crisis management is to take personal charge of the

situation for only as long as you are needed. Make the suggestion, take the action, give the instruction, and then step out; let the person who is normally in charge complete the job. Offer only the necessary help and trust your people to carry through.

- ◆ *Learn something from each crisis.* The handling of each crisis situation should make a direct contribution to future crisis prevention. After the excitement is over and the situation has returned to normal, hold a debriefing session to discuss the crisis with those involved to determine how a similar emergency can be avoided in the future. Make this a training opportunity and a planning experience — not a “place-the-blame” session. The more all team members learn about crisis management, the more capable they will be to handle future emergencies and the less you will be required to become involved yourself.



What Areas Influence Your Leadership?

Anything that shapes one's thinking or behavior is a conditioning influence. A conditioning influence may originate either internally or externally. The three most common conditioning influences are the family, the social environment and personal attitudes toward mistakes and failure.

Family

We sometimes overlook the fact that we are most often conditioned by influence rather than by some overt act or pressure. Fathers, mothers, older brothers and sisters – all influence us during our childhood. Not only by example, but by words – advice, arguments, or persuasion – we form an idea of what to expect of ourselves, and unfortunately those ideas are sometimes limited in scope.

Family influence encourages some people to try a little harder, to be better, more successful and to achieve greater things than anyone else in their family has yet accomplished. Sadly, family influence convinces others that they can never match the achievements of parents or older brothers and sisters; so they feel no motivation even to try.

A natural love for our families makes us loyal to their teachings and causes us to cherish family tradition and heritage. That can be good; but it is not always good. Such influences should be weighed in the balances of our own values, needs, and desires and subjected to our own freedom of choice.

You are the architect of whatever life you choose to build. If you are brainwashed, accepting without question the ideas and demands of others, it is only because you use your freedom of choice to allow it to be so.

Social

No one is an island. The adult, as well as the child, is subject to conditioning by outside influences and by the family. Youngsters are affected by interpersonal peer relationships, and teachers have an effect on their thinking, their conduct, and their personalities. As they grow older, the scene changes, and the names change, but social influences continue to bombard them. Ever since primitive people learned to band together for strength and protection, they have been conditioned by their environment and by society and its institutions. This, too, can be good. Without such conditioning, humanity might well have failed to survive.

Too much conditioned conformity, however, tends to cast all individuals in the same mold and they become average – fitting their talents and abilities into a mediocre model that everyone can match. Over-conditioned people lose the motivation to be what they were intended to be.

What is important to your personal leadership development is the determination of which conditioning influences are good and which are bad. You must learn to live in a society of compromise without being compromised. Recognize your unique possibilities. Make your own decisions about who you are and what you will become, rather than passively submit to the imprint of your environment.

Mistakes

There is a third conditioning influence to which all people are subjected – that of their own experiences. Because we are not born with a knowledge of the world, it is natural that in the learning process we make mistakes and experience failures. Learning proceeds

by trying, failing, adjusting and then trying again. Children learn to walk and talk that way. It is nature's way.

But the needs for both social acceptance and self-respect cause mistakes to be embarrassing. Failure can be shattering, particularly if early environment placed stress on perfection. A parent, a teacher, or even the boss in an early job who places extreme emphasis on the gravity of mistakes may cause leadership development to be restricted. We freeze up for fear of making another mistake. The fear of failure breeds timidity and causes hesitation to accept a challenge.

Failure itself is unimportant; your attitude toward it is crucial, for it can strengthen or destroy you. If you regard each mistake as a setback in your quest for achievement, that is exactly what it will become. When you look at mistakes as signposts to guide you in the adjustment phase of the learning process, failures strengthen you. Thrust a defiant chin at failure instead of turning a trembling back.

No one enjoys making mistakes or suffering defeat. But mistakes mark human progress. You can accept a mistake as a failure, or as a lesson in progress. You can accept it as a challenge or as a chastisement. There is more to be feared in not making mistakes than in making them.

To develop a healthy attitude toward mistakes and failure, see them as opportunities to develop your personal leadership skills.



Bridging the Gap Between Potential and Performance

Since 1966, Leadership Management® International, Inc. has been bridging the gap between potential and performance by helping organizations and individuals evaluate their strengths and opportunities through implementation of the unique and proven LMI Process™.

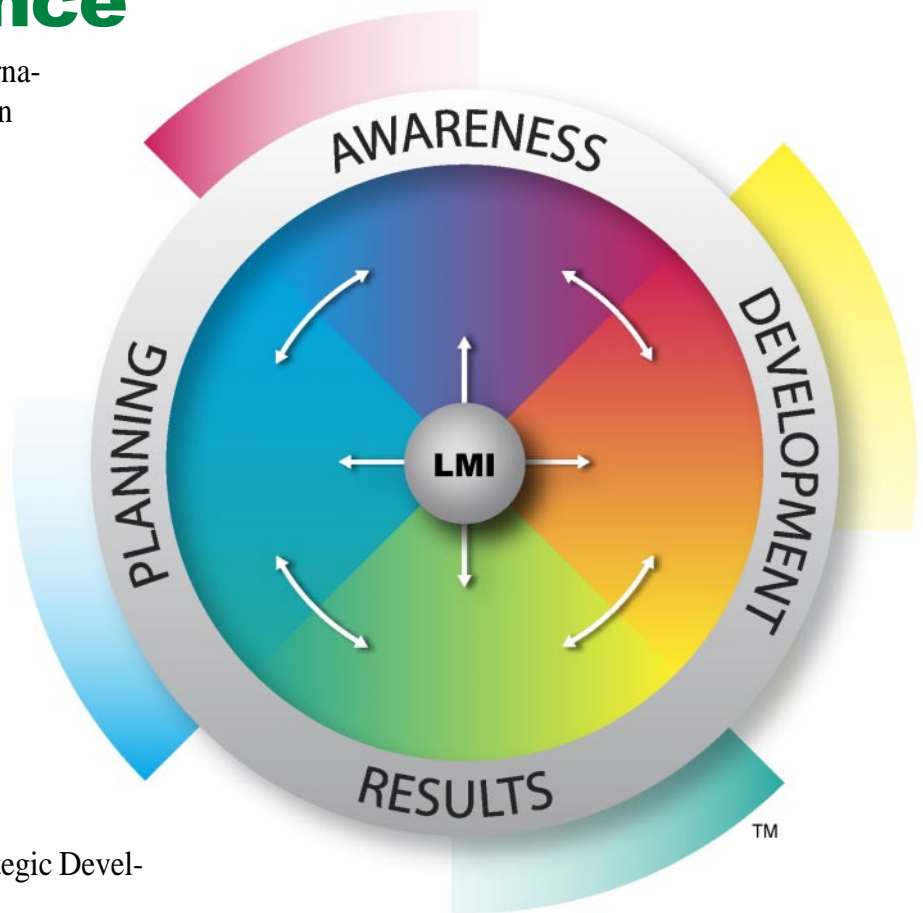
The LMI Process™ ...

- Develops leaders who, in turn, empower their people to use their untapped talents and abilities.
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- Awareness
- Development
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