

# forum

## local business



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## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LISTENING AND LISTENING WELL

**H**AVE YOU read the poem, "The Blind Men and the Elephant"? For those not familiar with the poem, let us summarize it. Because the men were blind, each touched different parts of the elephant. In their attempts to describe the elephant, each man came to a different conclusion. One for example thought the elephant was like a rope, and one thought the elephant was like a tree. Because each man believed he was correct, each disregarded the others' opinions.

Do you see how the poem relates to business? When our need to be right stops us from considering others' opinions, we are setting ourselves up for failure. We need to listen.

Do you listen well? Consider these three scenarios:

**No. 1 - Yes, I asked you; however, I do not want to hear a different opinion:**

During a staff meeting, one of your employees suggests other strategies to make the company's holiday party more fun. You knew that you had asked everyone to give his or her opinion; however, you assumed that everyone would say no changes were needed. In fact, you expected everyone to praise your planning skills. Yes, you did ask, but you do not want to hear a different opinion.

**No. 2 - Hurry up! Your opinion is not important to me:**

You know you are intelligent. You even have multiple advanced degrees to prove it. Because of your credentials, you earned the right to head the company. This is why you have little patience for your department heads, especially those without your credentials, who offer suggestions to enhance their departments. You know they tend to the day-to-day operations in their respective departments, but you have the credentials. Anytime one of them offers a suggestion, you show your disinterest. The only thing you want the person to do is to hurry up because his opinion is not important to you.

**No. 3 - What do you think? Hmmph. What do I think about what?**

An employee is telling you about the difficulties he is experiencing in his new position. As his supervisor, he assumes you would help him work through the issues. He does not know that you are experiencing difficulties staying focused on the conversation. After his first few sentences, your mind starts to wander to topics that include what you are going to wear to work tomorrow and your plans for the weekend. After he finishes describing his difficulties, he asks, "What do you think?" Startled, you reply, "Hmmph - what do I think about what?"

Do you see yourself in one of the scenarios? If so, you're not listening.

Being an active listener is essential. To be an active listener, you should give the person speaking your unconditional attention.

You need to remove yourself from anything distracting. Turn off the television or radio.

To ensure your understanding, you also should be able to paraphrase or put in your own words what the other person is saying. If needed, you should ask questions to enhance your understanding.

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