



# Different behaviours can and do create different outcomes

## 2. Open Your Ears

Hearing is one of our 5 senses and gives us the ability to perceive sound including speech. However the ability to perceive sound doesn't automatically an active listener make! Have you observed people's reactions when you speak? What about your own behaviour when someone speaks to you? Do any of the following sound familiar?

Does the speaker...

- receive acknowledgement through a smile, an audible response, perhaps a simple nod of the head
- receive no response at all
- get interrupted as the 'listener' assumes complete knowledge before the speaker has a chance to finish

As technology makes the world ever smaller the opportunities for human interaction are reduced putting further pressure on listening skills. Technology such as Twitter, email and SMS messaging encourage, by their very nature, short fast messages and a type of language quite different to that we've previously been used to. Even the telephone has taken on a different role in business through conference calls intermingled with internet based net-meetings, and these tools along with mobile phones and blackberry's allow a mobile workforce to be located anywhere in the world and available at any time.

There are obvious advantages and disadvantages with the constant evolution of technology. Business can use numerous tools and techniques to dramatically lower costs and shorten turn-around times adding positively to the bottom line. Remote working and outsourcing however brings with it new cross-cultural challenges and language differences that require quick learning of new listening skills. Active listening<sup>1</sup> can help significantly but to actively listen we have to stop; stop whatever we are doing and focus attention. If the speaker is physically with us we have the advantage of being able to look at them to see what is happening with their body language observing how that supports the words coming out of their mouth. If the speaker isn't physically present we must work much harder by concentrating and paraphrasing to ensure clarity of understanding.

Active listening requires us to be present in the moment, pay attention and validate understanding. To be in the moment requires a mind that is empty of what's gone before or what's yet to come. This provides us a space within which we can focus on the speaker. We have room to listen without barriers, prejudice, or judgement. It helps increase our understanding and reduces conflict as we listen for underlying emotions. This establishes a totally different atmosphere and builds trust leaving the speaker with an improved sense of inclusion and increased willingness to contribute all boosting motivation and productivity.

Let's see how in the following example the different behaviour of active listening created a different outcome.

### Different Behaviours creating Different Outcomes...

XYZ Company has spent many months specifying their Supply Chain requirements and incurring significant costs during their search and selection process. Contract agreed and budget approved, they've been working with their supplier of choice and everything has been going well. Other than a few small issues they are now experiencing a serious problem that threatens to derail the entire project. Agreeing a resolution is proving difficult and has been further complicated by the parties involved being located across various time zones.

Tempers are beginning to flare creating conflict and mistrust amongst the teams. Matilda (not her real name) is involved and has highly developed listening skills. During a conference call she has picked up on a comment made by another junior person who is not a member of the core project team. With a desire to resolve the issue quickly Matilda asked some very specific pointed questions and paraphrased the responses for further clarification to lead the discussion and problem through to a sensible conclusion. By doing this everyone participating in the call has benefited. They have a better understanding of the problem, the technology involved, and increased awareness of expertise previously unknown. The team has developed greater cohesion and boosted their working relationship, which will directly influence how they address future issues. For XYZ Company the biggest benefit is that the project has kept on track reducing the possibility of delay and a budget blowout.

Do you or your company regularly experience this type of behaviour and success in your change projects? How much faster and less disruptive to daily business would your projects be if these skills existed? Are you brave enough to make it happen?

We are renowned for being able to visibly show businesses how to make change happen fast. Through our newsletter and website you have direct access to the tips, tools and straight forward approach we use with the businesses we help.

Contact us now and we will help you and your business develop different behaviours to achieve the very different outcomes you want.

<sup>1</sup>Active listening - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active\\_listening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening)