



RUDE

Chapter 4

I'm Sorry ... What?

Sent: Monday, September 6 at 11:14 pm

From: CEO

To: Bev

Subject: What's up?

Bev, you wanted to tell me something? Just leave me a note with whatever it was. I'll let you know if it needs a response.

Thx.

As the leader, you need to *pretend* to listen to your people, but really you're using your time much more productively. There is a lot of talk these days about leaders being good listeners. But really that's just BS because leaders are good tellers. Your people are looking to you to tell them what to do. Besides, what could they possibly have to say that you would be interested in hearing?

The current buzz word is *active listening*. In fact *inactive listening* is actually more productive and more suited to a good leader. (Note to self: get a trademark on that phrase. Brilliant!) What this means is that you appear to be listening but you're not. First, it's important to look at the other person for a least a couple of seconds of the exchange, but God forbid, don't try to make eye contact because that's just awkward and weird. Once you've

made that initial head shake of listening, just drown out that annoying voice with thoughts about what else you have going on.

This is a great time for you to look around your office and think about what needs redoing or redecorating (it's always important to have a sharp-looking office), make your shopping list, or consider the things you really need to do (like make that appointment to get a haircut). When you've had enough of the patter and your lists are made, break out of your thoughts and say, "Give me the bullets, please." This way the other person will have to summarize and you'll get the gist of whatever they were blabbing on about.

If, for some reason, you can't seem to grasp what they are saying or you just plain don't care, ask them to summarize it in an email and send it to you so you can "think on it." This always works well, and they are so pleased that you not only listened but think it's worthy of a follow up email. And don't worry, there's no need to actually read or follow up on that email. Remember, you're a very busy leader.

Another great strategy for inactive listening is to let the person go on and on, and when you're bored, say, "I'm sorry, what?" This lets them know you were paying attention but want them to repeat a point. It definitely shows them you care, and empathy is always a sign of a good leader! And the best part is, it's only three words, saving you from actually having to have a conversation.

Always remember that when someone comes to talk to you, they really came to listen to you. They want to hear what you have to say on whatever subject they're talking about. You're the expert—why wouldn't they want to listen? So, after you've let them go on for a few minutes, cut them off and offer your words of wisdom on the subject, even if you don't know what the hell they were talking about. They just took up your time, now they can listen. And if they're loyal, they'll pick up a few tips they can use.

When sharing your wisdom, be sure to give as much or as little detail as you want. Sometimes it's just nice to hear your own voice. You might even sound more brilliant than you already thought you were, and that's always a pleasant sound. If you don't know the subject well, make stuff up because most people are sheep and they don't want to know the truth, they just want to know what you have to say and hear how you say it. Use big, generic words that are nonspecific and that can be applied to anything and anyone: words like *fantastic*, *great*, *amazing*, *terrific*, and *huge*.

There are a couple of pitfalls you want to avoid in inactive listening. First, never get too interested in the topic unless it's gossip about someone that you can use for your own purposes down the road. If it's gossip, press the talker for all the dirt they have because, as the leader, it's important that you know this and it's important that they know they can come dish to you anytime, like whenever they get a juicy tidbit.

The second pitfall is actually listening. You can get caught up in what the other person is telling you and actually forget that you don't care, which then makes them think you care. This is the death knell for a leader. It means you let your guard down, and they might think you are actually learning from or interested in something they have to say, which makes you weak. So, if you find yourself actually interested in something they are saying, look at your watch and let them know you have to go so they have a minute to wrap up. Tell them

to send you a summary of whatever they were talking about, and if it's good, use it at the next management meeting as your idea. Gets 'em every time!

Let's Get Real

As a leader, your job is to listen. People will not follow you or respect you if you don't care, and listening is a tangible way of caring about the speaker. Your job as a good leader is to mentor and teach all the time, and if you don't listen, you cannot possibly know how to mentor someone. This is empathy in action, but empathy doesn't necessarily mean that you have to take action on someone's behalf.

Your instinct will be to solve whatever the problem is, but that's not listening. Listen, ask questions, and help the other person solve the problem by talking it through. You can only do this through active listening, and there is no faking it. Active listening means not waiting to talk and not playing the tape in your head of a similar incident that you can share. It means being fully present to what's being said. It means having empathy and also listening to what's not being said. Ask questions, really trying to understand where the speaker is coming from and understand what they want or need from you. As a leader, it's also your job to learn, and the more you listen, the more you learn.

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(How Not to) Be a Leader

by Mary E. Marshall & Kim Obbink

(How NOT to) Be a Leader is the first in a series of how-not-to guides for newly minted leaders looking to avoid becoming feared or hated losers in the ivory tower or veteran leaders looking in the rearview mirror wondering where and why they ran off the road. Irreverent and hilarious, *(How NOT to) Be a Leader* shines a big bright spotlight on the oh-so-common mistakes that many leaders make when they plow forward through life and business without taking the time to really consider the effect their leadership is having on others. We've all seen and heard the horror stories of bad leadership, and hopefully many of us have been lucky enough to have been the benefactor of truly great leadership. Either way, if it's your turn at the top, *(How NOT to) Be a Leader* will help you understand what you can do to be a better leader by first understanding what you should never ever do; and if you are, why you should back up the truck, take another look at yourself and your leadership qualities, and do the work and self-reflection needed to get back on track.

Why this book series? Having been in the leadership trenches for a combined fifty years, we've seen a lot. Some good, some bad, and some really, really horrible. There was no guide for us, and we want to help all those leaders who will come after us. Not with a boring manifesto about a fictional leader who only exists in a book, but with real-life stories we've experienced or even perpetrated ourselves and vow never to repeat.

This book consists of twenty-four characteristics that you don't want to be known for. Not all twenty-four will apply to you and a few might resonate louder than others. What was it you heard in your last 360? Micromanaging doesn't work? You aren't listening? You want everyone to do it your way? You might have a few to work on, and our challenge to you is to choose three or four that seem the most immediate and start working on those. Once you've mastered them, take on a few more. And certainly share the book with those around you whose leadership styles need a little polish.

Should you accept this leadership challenge, you will be able to quickly identify twenty-four ineffective leadership traits and make changes to positively address them. Through the stories in this book, you will learn how to avoid the pitfalls of leadership, how to be a better leader, and, most importantly, how to pass good leadership on to those you lead.

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