7 Habits of Highly Effective Listeners

1. Highly effective listeners work at listening. They realize that listening takes practice to be done well.

2. Highly effective listeners look for a common area of interest in the speaker's message. They view listening as an opportunity to find out information.

3. Highly effective listeners maintain an open mind. Even if they disagree with what the speaker has to say, they still listen to understand the other person's viewpoint.

4. Highly effective listeners avoid distractions. They understand that anything can be a distraction to a listener.

5. Highly effective listeners can separate content from delivery. It is imperative to focus on the message and separate it from the speaker's appearance, style of speaking, mannerisms and the like.

6. Highly effective listeners know that active listening will help them make better decisions. They listen closely to others' ideas to improve their decisions.

7. Highly effective listeners know that pretending to listen is not better than admitting that they are not interested or do not have the time to listen. Your best listeners will let others know if they are not prepared to listen at that moment and, if possible, they will try to set up another time when they will be able to give 100 percent of their attention to the speaker.

This article is excerpted, by permission of the publisher, from *The Accidental Manager*. For more information on this book or other AMA book titles, visit www.amanet.org/books.

For more help in listening, check and register for AMA's seminars on leadership and management at www.amanet.org/seminars.

Successfully Leading Change

Successfully leading change is a tremendous challenge since a natural response to change is resistance. Change is a journey, and your responsibility is to pull your employees along. How do you do this—that is, build employee support of the idea?

Begin with yourself. What was your first reaction when you heard about the change? Was it fear or elation? Was it confusion or understanding? Are you anticipating the change or are you worried about its effect on the status quo? Your employees are likely to feel as you do about the change. You need to ensure they understand not only the nature of the change but its ramifications.

Meet with your staff as soon as the plans are made public to answer employee questions and undo any misconceptions. Observe the members of your group as you discuss the change. How are members of your staff reacting? Don't assume that silence is a positive response. It can be a sign of uncertainty, passive resistance or active opposition to the idea.

Would involving your employees in decisions related to the change, as well as its implementation, reduce resistance to the change? The more that people feel they can contribute and make a difference, even in the face of change, the more positive they will be about the change process.

If there is one point not to forget when telling employees about a change, it is the need to make a compelling case for it. Many change experts attribute the failure of change initiatives to a lack of sense of urgency about the need to change. There is often too much emphasis on who, what and where and too little on the why about a change plan.

Such sense of urgency needs to be balanced with feelings of personal confidence that the employees are capable of turning the situation around.

Since change means risk, you must expect that mistakes will be made. But your message, in the face of mistakes, must be that the only failure you're concerned about is the failure to try anything at all. Besides, problems routinely occur with any change initiative. Solving those problems may generate other problems, which will cause further problems. That is just the nature of change. All you can do is to address each problem calmly as it occurs.

To manage change more effectively, check out AMA's management and leadership seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars.

AMA Survey Results

The AMA/HRI Study The Quest for Innovation identified the following barriers to innovation:

1. Insufficient resources

2. No formal strategy for innovation

3. Lack of clear goals/priorities

4. Lack of leadership/management support

5. Short-term mindset

6. Structure not geared toward innovation

For solutions to these problems, check out best practices in innovative management at www.amanet.org/research.

E-Rules to Keep You in Business and Out of Court
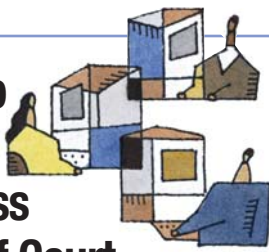
Any time you give employees access to your e-mail system, you potentially put your organization at risk. In her book *E-Mail Rules,* Nancy Flynn describes how to control liabilities by applying e-mail rules that address intentional misconduct, accidents and oversight.

Flynn's newer book *Blog Rules* explains how executives need to consider this expanding new phenomenon, not only how an organization without an external blog program may risk losing position, marketing share, reputation and sales to tech-savvy competition, but also how a business blog opens an organization up to political disasters, including the loss of trade secrets, negative publicity, damaged reputations and public embarrassment.

Here are some e-rules from Flynn, founder and executive director of the ePolicy Institute™:

- Review all content and comments before they are posted on corporate-sponsored blogs to ensure that your organization does not run afoul of laws.
- Have in place a policy governing the retention of electronic business records, including blog postings and readers' comments.
- Set up a blog management team to evaluate tech tools to block employees' access to external blogs in which they can accidentally or intentionally post comments that expose trade secrets or other confidential corporate information.
- Limit the amount of confidential or proprietary data stored on laptops and handhelds.
- Alert employees that e-mail and other electronic business records are the property of the organization. Theft of proprietary information may result in an employee's termination and may be punishable by civil or criminal penalties.

For more advice from Flynn about e-mail, instant messaging and blogging, register for AMA's Executive Forum "The Risks and Rewards of E-Mail, Instant Messaging and Blogging" at www.amanet.org/events.

Making Work More Motivating

If you want a real increase in motivation, you've got to look at the job itself.

Since certain job features are intrinsically satisfying, redesigning jobs can be a way to motivate employees. It is, after all, easier to change jobs in an organization than it is to change the job holders. There are three ways to redesign jobs:

1. Job rotation. Moving employees through a variety of jobs, departments or functions is a particularly good approach for someone who has been on a job for a long time, who is no longer challenged by the job or who has a strong need for activity or change. By giving an employee the opportunity to change jobs, you can prevent boredom and build a more versatile employee simultaneously.

2. Job enlargement. By expanding an employee's duties, you add challenge to a job that has become boring. Once an employee has demonstrated the capacity to handle the current workload and has shown a desire to expand into new areas, adding new responsibilities will tell the employee that you recognize his or her worth. This can be motivating.

3. Job enrichment. You make the job more desirable or satisfying. You give the performer more autonomy, input into decision making, more interesting projects, whole rather than fragmented projects or more information about the organization.

Of these three approaches, job enrichment has proven most effective in motivating employees. To work effectively, you and the job holder need to sit down to determine how you can enrich his or her job—that is, change the job so that corporate needs continue to be met but also the job holder's desire for challenge and excitement is satisfied.

Check out AMA's supervisory seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars to learn how to effectively motivate your employers.

Think Before You Redesign Jobs

Before you redesign a staff member's work to increase his or her motivation about the job, there are some questions you need to ask yourself about the individual's work:

Can the job be changed so the job-holder is responsible for the whole job from beginning to end? Obviously, a worker in an automobile factory can't build a whole car, but he or she could handle production of a carburetor.

Can you change the position so the employee can interact with users or clients? Having an ongoing relationship with the person who uses the service or finished product can give the individual a sense of being a person rather than a cog in the machinery.

Can the employee be taught a variety of skills or abilities so he or she can complete all the tasks associated with doing a job? This can eliminate—at least, minimize—the sense of monotony. A Website developer who has to follow a template day after day can become frustrated with the lack of creativity, but give that same technician the skills and knowledge to design sites and the individual will be more motivated.

Can the employee be trusted to run the show as far as the work is concerned? Not only would you be giving the employee an opportunity to participate in decisions, you would be giving him or her the freedom to decide how it should be done. Such autonomy can make the position more appealing in the long term and motivate the jobholder to perform the work effectively—and identify ways to do the work more efficiently.

Are there opportunities for self-development—that is, for the employee to stretch his or her mind and sharpen his or her skills in a way that makes the employee more valuable to future employers as well as your company? Look for goals that, satisfied, will help both the employee and your organization.

AMA offers a variety of learning opportunities for first-time supervisors and managers to help them maximize staff performance. To find out more about these programs, visit www.amanet.org/seminars.

The Diversity/Innovation Link BY DONNA J. BEAR

The most creative teams are drawn from diverse backgrounds, says Michael West, professor of organizational psychology at Aston Business School. West says such teams bring a variety of skills and knowledge to projects, offering creative solutions to problems because they approach problems with different perspectives.

Combining left-brain thinking and right-brain thinking is one way to ramp up team creativity, according to Ann Herrmann-Nehdi, CEO of Herrmann International, the consulting firm that publishes the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument. Her studies of whole brain thinking, which takes advantage of both the logical left brain and the creative right brain, have found that "whole brain" groups are 66% more effective than more homogeneous groups. Gender diversity on teams is one avenue for potentially generating this greater creative output.

Generational diversity may be another spur to creativity. In Biel, Switzerland, the company BrainStorc hires teenagers to solve problems and increase diversity. Co-founder Markus Mettler says the company is not seeking
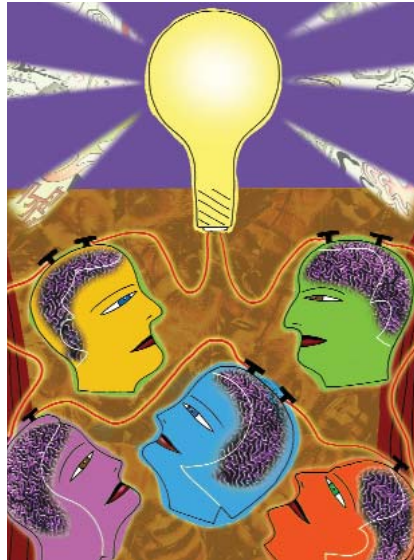
average ideas but "crazy ideas," and he's found that putting 17-year-olds on ad campaigns for large companies achieves a blend of the professionalism of experts with the unbridled enthusiasm of kids.

Tapping into customer diversity is another strategy. A growing number of businesses are spurring innovation by targeting new customer segments, inviting customer interaction in the design of new products and personalizing offerings based on customer preferences.

While many scholars agree that broad inclusion can increase creativity (as well as job satisfaction and overall competitive advantage), diversity alone won't guarantee it. For example, some theorists caution that diversity can interfere with group cohesiveness, causing conflict and difficulties in communication, trust and focus. Such teams need to be well managed to make sure conflicts remain constructive. Healthy interaction is critical because creativity is dependent on active participation by all members of a collaborative group.

And demographic diversity alone doesn't necessarily bring about true diversity of ideas. "We need diversity of thought, various perspectives and cultural heritages" if employees are to work on cross-functional teams, said Tania Aldous, a manager in the global consumer design department of Whirlpool Corporation. Others agree. It is important not to "bring in all clones," said Robert Sutton, a professor at Stanford University.

Donna J. Bear is a research analyst with the Human Resource Institute. Reprinted by permission of HRI. For more information, visit www.hrinstitute.info.

Your Role in Influencing Turnover

Research suggests that it isn't a single factor or initiative that can keep an employee with a company. Rather it is satisfaction with many factors, including fair pay and performance evaluations, career-development opportunities and family-friendly benefits, and employment with a company that has a good reputation and capable senior management team.

As a manager, you can influence personally the turnover within your organization by doing the following:

Carefully assessing the job and applicant: All too often, we idealize a job, hoping to lure a potential candidate on board. Similarly, we frequently aim for credentials that sound impressive but have little to do with what the employee

really needs to do the job. In short, people are hired on false pretenses and are offered quick advancement and varied assignments even when this will not be the case.

Orienting new employees. Once an employee takes the job, is he or she left to flounder? If so, he or she may find adjustment more difficult—prompting belief that the grass might be greener elsewhere.

Providing training. We can all stand to learn. But for the new employee, or any employee with a change in responsibilities, training is critical.

Clarifying goals. People have to know their responsibilities and the priorities that affect them.

Offering clear instructions. Don't assume employees will do the job according to your expectations. Make sure you have told them the parameters to which they must adhere.

Providing feedback. Employees want to know when they're doing well and when they're not.

Be supportive of creative thinking. Do you welcome suggestions? Are mistakes accepted or are employees constantly chastised? Executives and managers who encourage openness and support their employees create a more productive environment.

For more management insights, check out AMA's supervisory and management seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars.

Here's what you'll find on the
AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

LEADERSHIP

Leaders Must Have the Courage to Tell It Straight. Effective leaders understand that sometimes they have to shake things up by making unpopular decisions. Sander Flaum illustrates with some examples from Fordham University's Leadership Forum.

MANAGEMENT

Power Mentoring. The authors of the new book *Power Mentoring* discuss the latest innovation in the field: a broad network of various types of mentors, instead of the old one-on-one model.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Are You Promotable? Think you're ready to move up to the next level within your organization? Kate Wendleton, founder of The Five O'Clock Club, explains how to gauge your chances of getting a promotion.

SALES & MARKETING

Attention, Salespeople. It's Not About You. Salespeople set themselves apart from the pack when they adopt a "you" point of view toward customers. Ask: "What are *your* goals?" "What's *your* take on this?" "What is the biggest challenge you're facing right now?"

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Asian-Pacific Companies are Looking for Home-Grown Leaders. Major companies based in the Asia-Pacific region are intensifying their search for local talent rather than relying on leaders brought in from other areas of the world, according to a new report.

Book of the Month:
Discipline Without Punishment: The Proven Strategy that Turns Problem Employees into Superior Performers, by **Dick Grote.** This newly revised version of a management classic offers a step-by-step blueprint for the establishment of an equitable discipline process that will have a strong positive impact on employee performance.

For more information about this book and AMACOM's extensive catalog of business titles, visit www.amanet.org/books.
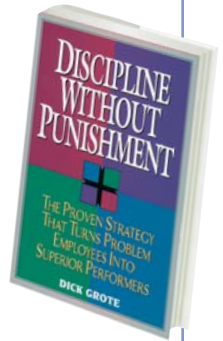
AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

JUNE 5-9, HILTON HEAD, SC • AMA's Course for Presidents and CEOs. Here's a rare opportunity for presidents and CEOs to reflect, regain their focus and hone the leadership skills that will move their business forward. Limited to just 25 presidents and owners of growing companies, this comprehensive, self-directed 4 ½-day learning experience also presents a great opportunity for frank and honest feedback from fellow leaders.

JUNE 6-7, CHICAGO, IL • World Business Forum 2006: Leadership Speaks. The premier international symposium for the business community, this two-day event offers cutting-edge ideas from the best business speakers, including William J. Clinton, Colin Powell, Michael Porter, Malcom Gladwell, Michelle Peluso, Kenichi Ohmae, Liu Jiren, Bruce Chizen, Rudy Giuliani, Marcus Buckingham and Dennis Nally.

JUNE 9, CHICAGO, IL /JUNE 13, NEW YORK, NY • The Risks and Rewards of Email, Instant Messaging and Blogging. This special Executive Forum, co-sponsored by the ePolicy Institute, RPost and MessageLabs, will focus on the risks and best practices of technology in business today. In two interrelated sessions—one in the morning, the other in the afternoon—expert speaker Nancy Flynn will discuss the importance of company-wide policies and procedures concerning e-mails, instant messaging and blogging.

JUNE 16, NEW YORK, NY • Successful Partnering/Alliance Management. Cisco revenue from strategic alliance partnerships has consistently delivered double-digit growth over the last five-plus years. At two interrelated Executive Forums—one in the morning, another in the afternoon—Cisco's Vice-President, Strategic Alliances, Steve Steinhilber, and leading experts will share the "ins and outs" of forming a strong partnering organization.

SEPTEMBER 11-15, HILTON HEAD, SC • AMA's Course for Presidents and CEOs. Here's a rare opportunity for presidents and CEOs to reflect, regain their focus and hone the leadership skills that will move their business forward. This comprehensive, self-directed 4 ½-day learning experience also presents a great opportunity for frank and honest feedback from fellow leaders.

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