15.281 Advanced Leadership Communication
Listening and the Power of Inquiry
22 February 2016

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Agenda

• Characteristics and Uses of Active Listening and Reflection
• Advocacy and Inquiry
• Practice Skills
• Preview of Wednesday’s Class
The Importance of Active and Reflective Listening

Time spent on each aspect of communication process:

- 40% Listening
- 35% Talking
- 16% Reading
- 9% Writing

What Research Shows
Communication is Meaning + Relationship

**Inquiry**
- Take perspective of others
- Encourage the expression of diverse opinions
- Withhold judgment while listening to others

**Advocacy**
- Champion new ideas
- Influence decisions made at higher levels
- Persuade others to consider ideas and proposals
- Make your thinking clear to others

**Valuing Others**
- Support others
- Treat others with dignity
- Help others succeed
- Make others feel supported
Communication is Meaning+Relationship

Ladder of Inference

Take Action

Data

Select Data

Add Meaning

Draw Conclusions

Beliefs Assumptions Values

What People Say And Do
Communication is Meaning+Relationship

We jump up the ladder

- Our beliefs, assumptions and values influence the data we select, the meanings we add, and the conclusions we draw.
- We select what we will treat as important.
- We add meanings and draw conclusions.
- Our thinking is effortless, fast, and works routinely.
- Our conclusions appear obvious – to us – and we rarely think about the steps.
If we could not jump up the ladder without stopping to think, life would pass us by.

With likeminded colleagues we get things done quickly and efficiently, because we don’t have to “reinvent the wheel”—we share a “common language” and assumptions.
Communication is Meaning+Relationship

And it gets us into trouble…

- People have different perspectives
- People in the same situation reach different conclusions.
- All believe their conclusions are obvious, with no need to illustrate the steps.
- The result: confusion, conflict and misunderstanding – with all sides “hurling conclusions” at one another from the top of their ladders or simply withdrawing.
How to listen actively

- Allow others time to finish sentences and pause
- Remain in the present
- Know you will have time to think about your response
- Remain neutral, non-judgmental
- Hold advice and opinion
Advocacy

• Stresses critical thinking – critiquing
• Creates adversarial thinking – confrontation
• Tests one viewpoint against the other to find the strongest

Many leaders focus on advocacy
• Presenting our views and arguing strongly for them
• Debating forcefully to influence others
Inquiry

• A complementary skill to advocacy that:
  – Seeks to discover information about why a particular view is held
  – Asks questions about underlying assumptions, beliefs, and reasoning
  – Explores:
    • Why do you believe this?
    • What logic leads to this conclusion?
    • What facts and data do you have?
    • What examples or past experience exists?
Inquiry continued

• Inquiry is supported by an attitude of wanting to understand, explore, learn, expand

• It is not a technique to cross examine individuals or find fault
Exercise: Listening and Humble Inquiry

• To raise awareness of your listening skills
• To practice verbal and non-verbal dimensions of active listening
• To practice humble inquiry
Inquiry Exercise

• In groups of three, Person A (Inquirer) will ask Person B (Explainer) a question of interest. Person B responds at length—you have up to five minutes—and Person A humbly inquires about what he/she is learning. Person C observes.
Possible Questions of Interest

- What can you teach me about
  - ... the management task you do best?
  - ... how to manage others?
  - ... adapting to a new environment?
  - ... ethical decision making in business?
  - ... asking for a raise/promotion?
  - ... leadership?
Preview for Wednesday

• Leadership Communication: Maximizing Feedback Conversations
• *READ*: The Double Meaning of Feedback; How to Give Feedback That Works; and The Secret to Giving Transformational Feedback
15.281 Advanced Communication for Leaders
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