



DANNY D. LANGLOSS, JR.

THE LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE PODCAST

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

"ONE-ON-ONE" LISTENING SESSIONS

PURPOSE:

One-on-one listening sessions are an excellent way for a leader to connect with team members individually. They are one of a leader's greatest tools, because taking the time to sit down with a team member for the sole purpose of asking questions, listening, and getting their perspective tells the team member several things:

1. I care about you.
2. I see you.
3. You are important.
4. Your thoughts, ideas, and opinion matter.
5. You have value.

When people feel all 5 of these things, it builds trust, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging. The team member feels like they matter, which also drives purpose.

In addition to these internal feelings of self-worth and fulfillment, these conversations increase the trust for the supervisor, strengthen the supervisor / team member relationship, and increase influence.

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SITUATIONAL USE:

- a. Newly appointed supervisor
- B. Annual or semi-annual check-ins
- c. Supervisor struggling with leading team

SITUATIONS "A" AND "B" (ORGANIZATION / TEAM FOCUS)

1. What do you like most about working at (organization name here)?
2. What do you like most about working with our team?
(smaller group focus)
3. What do you think is really going well within our organization?
4. What do you think is really going well within our team?
5. If you had a magic wand and could change one thing, what would it be and why?
6. What do you see as the greatest challenge or threat to our organization?
 - a. How would you solve or fix the challenge?
 - b. What can we do to better prepare for the threat?
7. What do you see as the greatest challenge facing our team?
 - a. How would you solve or fix the challenge?
8. What could we do to help make your job easier?

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SITUATIONS "A" AND "B"(PERSONAL FOCUS)

1. What are the things that matter the most to you in your life?
2. When do you feel most alive?
3. What sets you on fire?
4. What are you most passionate about?
5. What are your 3 most important values?
6. What is most important to you in your work experience?
7. How important is purpose to you?
8. What are the most important things to you in your personal life?
9. What are the thing that are most important to you for the place you work? (Relationships, teamwork, vision, serving others, helping others, making a specific impact, etc.)
10. What parts of your job makes you feel like what you do matters?
11. What talent or strength do you have that you feel we are overlooking?
12. What is something you would like to be involved in with our team that you currently are not part of?

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SITUATIONS "A" AND "B"(LEADERSHIP)

1. What qualities are most important to you in a supervisor?
2. What motivates you and what can we do to create more of this at work?
3. How do you like to receive recognition?
4. What is one thing I could do different to improve my leadership for your and our team?
5. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you would like to talk about?

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LISTENING SESSIONS - STRUGGLING SUPERVISOR

INTRODUCTION

We often judge ourselves based on our “Intent” and judge others on their “Behaviors”. The problem is that everyone else does the same thing. The human brain can trick us into thinking our intent became our behavior, when it actually did not. This gap between our “Intent” and our “Behavior” is a critical component of our level of emotional intelligence (EQ). The bigger the gap between how we see ourselves versus how others see us, the less EQ we have. This creates significant leadership issues.

“One on One” listening sessions are a powerful way for a leader who is struggling to regain the trust and confidence of their team. This helps us increase our EQ and our overall leadership success. These sessions also help uncover problems within our team. While the problems and issues may not be the “fault” of the leader, it is the leader’s responsibility to create a healthy and positive work culture. This begins with a positive, respectful relationship between the leader and their team.

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In order to solve a problem, we first have to understand it. This is why asking questions and listening to “understand” vs listening to “respond” or “judge” is essential. In these listening sessions, the leader is not trying to determine “right” or “wrong”. The leader is simply trying to understand how their team member sees them as a leader and how this is making the team member feel. Demonstrating this type of empathy is a strong connection, rapport, trust, and relationship builder. All of these things are essential for leadership.

These listening sessions not only help us understand the underlying issues, they help us understand what is important to our team member and what they need from us. Once we know this, it becomes easy to solve the “perceived” or “real” problem and put on a path for leadership success.

WHAT MAKES LISTENING SESSIONS SO EFFECTIVE?

It takes a lot of humility for a leader to sit across from their team member, admit they are struggling, and ask for help. This eliminates any perception of arrogance, superiority, or power and control.

When we ask our team member for help, it tells them that we respect, trust, value, and appreciate their opinion and them as a person. When a person agrees to help us, they become invested in our success.

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When we listen to “understand” versus “respond” or “judge”, it clearly communicates to the person that we are hearing them. This also generates very positive emotions in the team member. The listening session will help us determine if there is really a problem or if the issue is a matter of misperception. If there is a misperception, the listening session will likely solve this issue. If there is a problem, once we fully understand what behaviors are creating the problems, we now know how to correct them.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL LISTENING SESSION

Listening sessions should be done in a private setting without interruptions. Many times, these conversations will last longer than expected, so make sure to block off plenty of time. Before beginning the conversation, make sure you are ready to hear tough feedback. It is critically important to have your “poker face” on during this conversation. It is very difficult for someone to give us critical feedback. If our body language shows we are not taking the feedback well, it will stop our team member from sharing openly and candidly.

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Key Components of Successful Listening Sessions:

1. Introductory Statement
2. Ask for Help
3. Ask Good Questions
4. Listen to Understand, Not to "Respond" or "Judge"
5. Ask Follow Up Questions
6. Do Not Justify or Defend Yourself
7. Thank Them
8. Commit to Action

Key Elements of an Introductory Statement:

1. Thank them for talking to you.
2. Admit you are struggling.
3. Ask for their help.

Here are three examples of an introductory statement:

"Good morning, John. I really appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. It has come to my attention that I am struggling to lead our team effectively and I wanted to ask you for your help. Is it okay if I ask you some questions, so I can figure out what I need to do better to serve you and our team?"

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"Good afternoon, Sarah. Thank you for meeting with me. I wanted to see if I could get your help. Lately, I feel like I am struggling to connect with our team. There seems to be some issues developing and I am concerned I am part of the problem. Would you be willing to give me some honest feedback, so I can improve my leadership?"

"Thank you for meeting with me, Bill. I am in the process of doing one on one listening sessions with our entire team. It has come to my attention that there are issues with my leadership, and I am hoping to get some guidance on how I can improve. Would you be willing to help me?"

Possible Additional Statement / Reassurance:

If it is essential that we let our team member know that we don't want them to hold back with the way they feel. The only way we can improve and do a better job for our team is if people share honest feedback with us. Depending on how the conversation is going, we may need to reassure them that it is okay to share critical feedback.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

The effectiveness of this meeting is greatly determined by the questions we ask. Open-ended questions are often the most effective. If we are having trouble getting the person

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to open up, we can ask a “yes” or “no” question, but these questions should be followed up by an open-ended question.

One of the simplest ways to get a person to give more information on what they have said is to simply state, “Tell me about that” or “Can you please tell me more about that”. These two questions can be used as follow up questions to almost any question we ask.

Sample Questions for Listening Session:

1. What are the most important things you look for in a leader?
2. What things do you like about my leadership style?
3. What do you feel are my biggest areas for growth as a leader?
4. What is one thing I could change that would make me a better leader? (Two or three things?)
5. What are things that I do that you wish I would do more of?
6. What are things that I do that you wish I would stop doing?
7. How can I better support you?
8. If you were leading our team, what would you do differently?
9. Is there anything that I could do or stop doing that would make it easier to work with me?

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There are many questions we can ask to determine what is going well and where the person feels we need to improve. The flow of the conversation will determine the best questions and follow up questions to ask. Some people will be really open and give us everything we need with just a few questions. Some people will be more closed, and we will have to try to pull the information out of them.

DO NOT JUSTIFY, ARGUE, OR DEFEND YOURSELF

The purpose of this conversation is not to argue about how the other person feels. It is to understand how they view things and how they feel. There are definitely situations where we need to share additional information to give a full picture on a specific topic, but we need to be very careful in how we approach this.

Where possible, if our words or behaviors have created a negative emotion in our team member, it is best to apologize for making them feel this way and moving forward.

What we cannot do in these conversations is justify, argue, or defend every negative point that is shared with us.

THANK THEM

Demonstrating an understanding of how difficult it is to share open feedback is an important part of this conversation. This can be stated during the beginning of the conversation or at the end when we thank them for being open and honest with us.

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At the conclusion of the conversation, it is important for us to give a sincere and genuine “thank you” to our team member for taking the time to talk and share with us. It is also important to leave the door open for future conversations. We have all walked away from a conversation and later thought about something we wish we would have shared. In our closing, let our team member know that if they think of something else that could be helpful after the meeting to please share it with you.

COMMIT TO ACTION

It doesn't matter if we plan to make a big change or a small change, but if we have gotten critical feedback from our team member, it is important to commit to changing and working to become a better leader. It is also important to ask our team member to come to us if they see us reverting back to a prior negative behavior. This further strengthens the connection developed through helping another person.

CONSIDER A TEAM MEETING

If we have conducted numerous one on one listening sessions with our team members, it may be a good idea to hold a short team meeting once the sessions are all completed. During this meeting, the leader can thank the team for their time and help.

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During the meeting, the leader should provide a list of their key takeaways and areas they are working to grow and improve. The leader can also reiterate his openness to continued feedback and support. After all, we are one team and we have to have each other's back. Done correctly, this is a very powerful meeting that will build incredible trust and respect for the leader.

CONCLUSION:

In this document, we have shared the importance of "one-on-one" listening sessions and questions across three key areas. These questions will help facilitate meaningful conversation between you and your team member. They will allow you to lead the whole person and give you the best opportunity to help your team member live their purpose, feel like they belong, and ultimately help them reach their full potential.

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