

## BEST PRACTICES

By Lisa Weis

# Connecting at the core

## “Listen like a leader” to engage your organization

The Mid-Atlantic Region is deeply committed to helping companies create a people-centric culture and has offered the “Listen Like a Leader” workshop eight times since 2013. The course was developed by global capital equipment and engineering solutions leader Barry-Wehmiller. In 2013, AME partnered with the company to offer the course to AME members in support of the AME vision: A manufacturing renaissance driven by people-centric leadership coupled with enterprise excellence. Since then, the Mid-Atlantic region has offered the course at multiple locations in Delaware, touching the lives of 135 participants from 22 organizations.

Employee engagement is a hot topic today for many organizations and is the theme of the 2017 AME International Conference in Boston. Recent Gallup polls report that only about 30 percent of the workforce is engaged, costing an estimated \$450-\$550 billion annually in lost productivity. Unfortunately, this statistic has not changed significantly since the year 2000. Leaders recognize that this is the No. 1 threat to their business, but the question is, how do you “get” engaged employees? The reality is, you

can’t make employees engaged. You can only create an environment that will inspire them to be engaged. As stated by J. Irwin Miller, CEO of Cummins, Inc.: “The truth of the matter in business is that you don’t do anything by yourself. You create an atmosphere in which people want to do their best. You don’t order anybody to do their best. You couldn’t order Beethoven to compose the Ninth Symphony. He’s got to want to do it.”

At the core of creating an engaging environment is connection—connection to others and to a higher purpose. Connecting and building relationships is not entirely an innate skill; it is learned and developed over time. Unfortunately, organizations have not put much emphasis on the development of interpersonal/social skills. If we want to thrive in today’s competitive environment, perhaps it would be wise to place more emphasis on developing these foundational skills. The landscape of leadership is changing. Today’s leaders need to understand the profound impact they have on the people they lead.

According to William Fierle of Conax Technologies and AME board member, who has participated in the course, along with members of his leadership team,

“This course is not optional. As a team, we need to have a common language, a common experience. Imagine the possibilities if we all learn to really listen.”

The “Listen Like a Leader” course is a very distinctive approach to training; it is designed to foster personal growth, help people build better relationships and profoundly touch the lives of others. The course helps people put into practice the principles and values necessary to create a culture in which every day, everyone goes home fulfilled by pursuing excellence, and everyone flourishes. Upon completing the class, Scott Banks with SPI Pharma pointed to the company core values prominently displayed on the wall and said, “This class is what we need to live these core values.”

The course is actually more of a learning journey than an event that takes place in a classroom over three days. It is designed to support significant behavioral change. This requires that participants “choose” to take part in the class. It begins with preparation and pre-work prior to entering the classroom in which participants are asked to reflect on their personal expectations and complete a Personal DISC Communication Profile Questionnaire.



Participants in the “Listen Like a Leader” workshop develop skills designed to foster personal growth, help build better relationships and profoundly touch the lives of others.

Integral to the classroom experience is a teambuilding event on the evening of the first day that builds trust and helps emphasize key learning points from the classroom experience. Throughout the three-day course, participants are given the opportunity to reflect and self-evaluate, participate in group discussions and practice new skills through in-class exercises. Upon completion of the classwork, participants receive a 90-day learning journal and are assigned a learning partner to assist them in putting into practice the new skills that they have learned in the classroom.

The classroom portion of the course includes five interlaced modules that progressively build upon each other. It begins with an orientation that defines the primary objective of the course, the

## Listen Like a Leader – Five Interlaced Modules



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overall course methodology and the learning journey that participants will experience over the next three days and beyond.

## 1 Know thyself

Knowing thyself is the first step in the journey. In the first module, participants learn about their behavioral tendencies and the core behavioral tendencies of others. Each participant receives an Extended DISC report, based on their responses to the DISC Communication Profile Questionnaire that provides them with specific information about their unique behavioral tendencies profile. (DISC is a behavior assessment tool based on the works of William Moulton Marston, which centers on the four behavioral tendencies; dominance, influence, steadiness and conscientiousness). Recognizing that all behavioral tendencies are driven by needs and all behaviors are a choice, participants learn the power to “style-flex” their behavior to meet the needs of others and become more effective and efficient communicators. As Brooks Bradley from SPI Pharma stated, “The class was an enlightening experience. It helped me realize that

everyone has certain traits and behaviors. Understanding this helps me to be a better communicator.”

## 2 Connect

Communication is what fuels connection; it creates knowledge. In the second module, participants are introduced to the concept that communication occurs in a multistep cycle of sending and receiving. Most importantly, participants learn that we communicate with both our presence and our voice.

## 3 Communicate

Most experts agree that about 93 percent of our communication is actually conducted nonverbally and that we are communicating what we are thinking and feeling 24/7. In the third module, participants learn about the four different aspects of nonverbal communication and the power of nonverbal communication both in sending and receiving a message. At the core of this module is the concept that “you are the message.” So the question becomes, what is the message you are sending? Are you the leader you intend to be?



Participants at Dentsply-Sirona learn about the five reflective listening skills from instructor Lisa Weis.

## 4 Listen

Listening is perhaps the most important and yet, forgotten side of communication. Listening allows us to understand the other person, to see into the mind of another person and to connect with others. By listening to others, it is more likely that they will listen to us. Learning to “Listen Like a Leader” is critical for innovation and continuous improvement. Creative solutions and innovative breakthroughs require listening without judgment. When someone shares a crazy idea, the first instinct is to cite all the reasons why it wouldn’t work—shutting it down with a “no, but” response. This can paralyze a team from exploring new and different options.

Listening is also the most helpful thing that we can do. When we listen, we help people grow and develop by allowing them to solve their own problems. As Aquilla Cartwright from Dentsply-Sirona realized in a recent class, “It is truly an amazing feeling to solve a problem. I never thought about how I was denying others of that feeling by solving their problems and not listening.”

“There are several reasons why the ability to actively listen has never been more

# 5 Steps to listen like a leader

1

Connect

Know thyself

2

Communicate

3

Listen

5

Bend

important. The pace of business continues to accelerate. Managers don't have the luxury of time to figure things out and need to understand their people's perspectives to make better decisions," said Allan Coletta with Siemens. "Similarly, everyone is doing more with less people. Reflective listening skills foster collaboration, unlocking the ideas of many to solve problems quickly. Active listening is the greatest act of respect we can show someone. It is the key to establishing strong, trusting relationships that unlock human potential. Leaders and team members alike must learn how to listen. We must proactively develop this critical skill to ensure business and personal success."

Most people believe listening is being silent until the other person stops talking or that listening is an innate skill; "I have ears; therefore, I can listen." Listening is neither of these things. In the fourth module, participants learn the five skills of reflective listening and the importance of empathizing while listening.

## 5 Bend

Building on the previous four modules, in the fifth module, participants learn a new way to confront others, the way of the "bent knee." Using this approach, participants learn how to get their needs met while preserving a positive relationship with the other person. "The biggest impact of the class was learning how to conduct a productive confrontation without fear. The 'bent knee' approach will prove highly beneficial in all areas of my life, and will allow me to get what I need by giving others what they need," said Parker Smith, SPI Pharma.

## Conclusion and results

At the conclusion of the course, participants are invited to "shift their default mode" in the way that they communicate and connect with others. This takes practice, conscious effort and self-reflection over time.

It is difficult to accurately measure the impact that this class has had on

the participants and the organizations for which they work. In reviewing the numerous testimonials provided from participants, the impact is profound, resulting in improved relationships, higher acceptance and understanding of others, as well as a deeper understanding of themselves. This ultimately leads to improved productivity. "As a result of this class, morning standup meetings are much more effective, resulting in improved quality and improved on-time customer delivery," said Carl Resetarits with Conax Technologies.

Most businesses would agree that it is "all about the relationships." There is a tremendous amount of time wasted in the workplace as a result of toxic or negative relationships. It would be difficult to predict the lost productivity as a result of this and the potential productivity gains as a result of healthy relationships and strong teams working toward a common goal.

"With the skills that I learned in the class, I have become a person who is very much in control of my responses," said Pat Mielk, Hologic. "In a heated meeting at work, I was challenged by an engineer in a very aggressive and personal manner. The old me would have jumped at the chance to defend myself and set the record straight. This time, I sat there calmly and listened to this person spew and vent without saying a word in response. Interestingly, I wasn't even upset by the attack, because I knew that 'it wasn't about me, it was about him.' It is truly amazing that I was able to remain calm and come away without any hard feelings. The best part is that after the meeting, I was able to go about my work with a clear mind instead of 'running the tapes' over and over in my head and stressing about how I should have handled the situation."

In addition, many organizations struggle to realize the full potential of their continuous improvement/lean programs. If associates do not feel heard, they do not buy in to changes, and good ideas are shot down, dismissed or never communicated. People's problem-solving skills remain underutilized and undeveloped.

People are not given the time to process change and are expected to go from awareness to action immediately. People's needs are ignored.

The skills in the "Listen Like a Leader" training may be the missing link. "Change or continuous improvement is a difficult thing. You might consider the 'Listen Like a Leader' training as the foundation, with the employees being the blocks. When you are able to fill in all the blocks, you are now prepared to build the structure of the organization. Develop a new culture for success," said Ed Short with Justin Tanks.

Employee disengagement is a major threat and competitive disadvantage. Today's leaders are responsible for engaging their teams, one person at a time. This requires leaders to be self-confident and humble, recognizing and showing appreciation for the strengths in others. The reality is, if we want to improve engagement in our organization, it begins with changing ourselves as leaders, colleagues and associates.

In the words of Mahatma Ghandi, "Become the change that you want to see in the world." The "Listen Like a Leader" course provides some of the foundational skills you need to become the leader you aspire to be and to engage your organization. ☀

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## Mark your calendar

The Mid-Atlantic Region will be offering the "Listen Like a Leader" course Sept. 12-14 at Siemens Healthineers in Newark, Delaware. For more information, visit [ame.org/event/listen-leader-0](http://ame.org/event/listen-leader-0).