

# SITE SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP, INC.

## You're Not Hearing Me!

*"To listen well, is as powerful a means of influence as talking well, and is as essential to all true conversation." -- Chinese Proverb*

**Has anyone ever said to you, "you haven't heard a word I'm saying?"**

- Are you so committed to your point of view that you just can't wait for your turn to talk?
- Do you listen to understand what the other person is saying or to disprove of him/her?
- Do you find yourself making up arguments instead of focusing on what the other person has to say?
- As you're reading these bullet points or are you thinking: that's what the other person is doing, not me?

We have all experienced a certain level of dysfunction in the workplace, at home, or in our community. As someone who works on managing differences in the work environment, I am entirely aware of how certain self-destructive impulses, when unleashed, damage interpersonal relationships, peace and productivity.



A few months ago, while attending several HOA meetings, I was stunned by rude behavior for which I have no words. There was little decorum and even less meaningful dialog. The emotional temperature of the group was fairly high. Lately, and somehow magically, the way members have been interacting in these public forums has shifted dramatically. Perhaps, the current national consciousness about civility has been raised, in the wake of violence (at a council meeting; at a school board meeting, at a supermarket in Tucson). A parliamentarian at this HOA was asked to read from Robert's Rules of Order, the section on civility, before every meeting. I was delighted, when attending a recent board meeting. Everyone was polite and the atmosphere in the room was very positive. Members were participating and volunteering in the process of governing the Association. Just by reminding people they were expected to behave civilly, made a remarkable difference.

The HOA in question is virtually a small town where people interact and express their views at social events, in committees and at group meetings, board meetings and annual meetings. Sometimes, they exhibit "wrong reflexes" such as storming out, stuffing their emotions or lashing out inappropriately. People behave this way to protect themselves from feeling frustrated or to retaliate when perceiving a slight. In group situations, some may get into a power struggle to impose a one-sided solution and use intimidation to win.

Here are three simple yet valuable tips of personal engagement when you find yourself in a contentious situation:

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- Civility and mutual respect goes a long way to lighten the situation
- Don't distance yourself or withdraw from communication
- Don't coerce to win a power struggle
- Commit to finding a time to talk

## You Lose Them...

- When your mind is filled with the chatter of "they're so wrong," you will miss out on important insights and opportunities to reach mutual purpose.
- When you are not in a frame of mind to acknowledge what is true in the other person's point of view.
- When you invalidate the other person's feelings or perceptions
- When it's more important for you to win than to find a resolution.

## Check Out Your Intentions and Your Internal Dialogue

- Be honest about what you really want from the conversation.
- You have blind spots. The only way to pull up the shade on these, is to acknowledge that we all have personal biases, beliefs, attitudes and values which deeply shade our perception.
- Are you engaging in either/or thinking? Meaning there's no room for flexing.
- Are you past the point of listening and in a reactionary mode?
- Do you really want to advance shared understanding?
- Get your motive straight -- do you want to resolve a situation or prove you're right?
- How are your opinions and feelings influencing the facts?
- How is the other person seeing the same facts? Are you seeing them as negative and is the other person seeing them as positive?



## Tips

1. People tend to keep quiet when they feel unsafe. Address concerns by making clear statements of what you want and don't want: "I do not want to upset you." "I do respect your opinion." "I want to reach an understanding with you."
2. Make your intention about caring that both of you can expand outside tightly held positions and arrive at mutual benefits, by examining and appreciating alternate points of view.

## Why Bother?

1. It will improve your health and well being
2. It will improve your relationships
3. It will enhance your job performance
4. It will positively change the work environment
5. It will nurture good will within the community

Remember, we interpret what we see and hear. We react to the feelings from the thoughts we have.

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