

Train yourself in the art of listening

Once you learn how to listen to employees, your managerial skills will improve dramatically. You'll communicate better and solve more problems. Here are some exercises that will improve your listening skills and help you get the most out of each meeting with an employee:

- **Clean off your desk when meeting with employees.** If there are loose papers on your desk, you'll unconsciously start to fiddle with them—and may even start to glance over them. Clear your desk for every conversation with employees, so you can focus your attention on what they're saying.
- **What is the color of the employee's eyes?** Train yourself to notice eye color at the start of every conversation. It ensures that you'll make significant eye contact—which leads to more productive conversations. *Important:* Don't focus so much on eye color that you don't listen to what is being said.
- **Train yourself to ask questions instead of making statements.** *Example:* Don't say, "Joan, don't forget that the Anderson report needs to be in on Monday morning." Rather, say, "How is the Anderson report coming

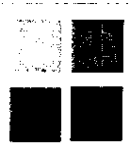
along, Joan? Any problems with making the deadline?" By asking questions you'll start a dialogue, and you never know what you might learn.

- **Learn to "lubricate" conversations.** Phrases such as "Yes, I see" and "I understand" do two things: 1) They show that you're listening and encourage the other person to keep talking; and 2) They keep your attention focused.
- **Don't blurt out questions as soon as the employee is finished speaking.** It looks as if you were formulating your reply rather than listening. Before you ask a question, paraphrase the employee's words. *Example:* "So what you're saying is . . ." Then, ask your question: "Well, let me ask you this . . ." This cuts down on miscommunication.
- **Don't smile the whole time.** A lot of managers do this because they think it sends a friendly message. It can, but people also often mistake it for mental absence, or a sign that you're not taking them seriously. Save smiles for humorous remarks.

change

If we don't change the direction we're going, we're likely to end up where we are headed.

—Chinese proverb



abuse is evil

Capital as such is not evil; it is its wrong use that is evil.

—Mohandas K. Gandhi, social reformer

Delegating work—the most crucial skill a manager needs to learn

Delegating work properly does a lot more than make your life as a manager easier. It builds teamwork, increases efficiency, develops careers, raises morale, and boosts productivity. But it's not always easy to do. Here are some simple strategies to get you started:

1. **Delegate responsibility, not work.** Too many managers confuse delegating responsibility with dumping work on someone. Employees know the difference. Don't assign a project and insist that the employee do it your way—with no room for personal initiative.
2. **Let employees take turns running staff meetings.** This does three things: First, it shows them that you respect and trust their abilities; second, it builds their confidence and leadership skills; and finally, it gives you a chance to see how someone handles a group—in case you ever consider promoting that person to a managerial position.

3. **When delegating, don't ask an employee, "Do you understand?"** A lot of employees will answer yes regardless—for fear of looking stupid. Instead, ask questions such as, "Any ideas off the top of your head as to how you'll proceed?" You'll get a better sense of whether or not you were clear in your directions.
4. **Keep a "delegation diary."** Once you realize how effective and uplifting proper delegation can be, you'll want to do it more often. Be careful. And be organized. Keep a written record of which projects you've delegated to which employee.
5. **Establish routine checkups.** At the beginning of the delegation process, establish meetings in advance when you and the employee can sit down and make sure everything is on track. *Important:* Don't check up every day. You want employees to feel as if you trust them to get the job done on their own.