**LISTENING BARRIERS:**

Listening is an important leadership skill because it contributes to employee engagement. Employees who feel like their perspective matters share information openly and candidly which can be invaluable in effective problem-solving and timely goal accomplishment for both individuals and teams. An open, listening culture communicates value for individuals, their perspective and experience. Unfortunately, we often inhibit or prevent real connection when we knowingly or unknowingly engage in ineffective listening practices.

Here are seven different types of listening that can negatively impact our ability to effectively connect with and truly hear what others have to say.

**1. Evaluative listening.**

This listening behavior is on display when the person is either constantly agreeing or disagreeing with you. They evaluate everything you say from their perspective. The problem with this type of listening is that it is based on a selective perspective -- their own. Consequently, they may likely miss critical information that is offered by others. Their constant evaluation may end up turning the conversation into a sort of verbal jousting match where one person says something and the other person counters what he or she said. This then causes the first person to offer a counter argument to the person’s response. Both parties get caught up in the process of disagreement rather than understanding one another.

## 2. Self-protective listening.

This is the type of listening that I experienced with the person I was coaching. He was so filled with negative emotion and so focused on telling his story, that there was no room for anything else. When I tried to ask questions or offer alternative interpretations of his experience, he would simply return to the recitation of his negative experience. What was interesting was that as he retold his experience, his story picked up emotional intensity with each telling. These negative emotions seemed to further hijack rationality as he continued to protect his interpretation of the situation and the legitimacy of his feelings.

## 3. Assumptive listening.

This is probably one of the most common and difficult forms of poor listening that all of us struggle to overcome. This type of listening occurs when we assume we know what the person will say or what they want. We try to figure out what the person is thinking or wanting rather than listening to what the person is actually saying. Setting aside our assumptions about people is challenging because of the past experience or history that we have with them. We may also be impatient or in a hurry to end the conversation and so try to prompt it to move faster by “helping” the other person along. In order to overcome this negative form of listening, we must set our thinking aside and give our full attention to the individual and their message, allowing them time to express their thoughts and feelings.

## 4. Judgmental listening.

This type of listening takes the approach of criticizing all that the person says or does. You can tell when a person is engaged in this listening behavior because they disagree, condemn or criticize whatever someone else may offer. Unfortunately when someone responds this way, the other person becomes tired or afraid of being put down, so they quit speaking up and sharing their perspective. They withdraw and will eventually become completely disengaged.

## 5. Affirmative listening.

A person who engages in this type of listening focuses solely on whether or not the person who is speaking agrees with their point of view. Consequently, they don’t hear, nor do they explore, differing points of view. They like to be acknowledged, affirmed and validated, so they listen only from that perspective and miss valuable information.

## 6. Defensive listening.

This listening behavior occurs when a person takes everything that another may say as a personal attack. Such an interpretation leads the individual to “yeah, but” everything the other person says. You might find such a person constantly justifying or defending everything they say or offer. This type of behavior prevents them from exploring or understanding differing views and experiences of others. They are only interested in defending their own perspective.

## 7. Authoritative listening.

This type of listener always has to be right. It is also not uncommon for them to offer advice. They engage in far too much “should-ing” to people. These listeners imply that you may not have the ability to complete a task or figure something out on your own, so they tell you what you should or need to do. This is a strategy for controlling the situation and guaranteeing that the desired outcome will be what they want it to be.

It is interesting to note that these differing listening behaviors are often self-projections of our own inadequacies. Additionally, when we engage in these types of listening approaches, we are seeking something for ourselves rather than trying to truly understand one another. These approaches also imply that the other individual may not have anything to offer, which couldn't be further from the truth.