



**The Guardian
Service**
Here to listen

The Power of Speaking Up - A Reflective Guide

THE DYNAMICS OF SPEAKING, LISTENING AND HEARING UP

How to use this guide

For the individual



This is a guide for everyone in the workplace – from the most senior to the most junior.

It is designed to get you thinking about the dynamics of speaking, listening and hearing up and planning actions for yourself that can improve these processes in your organisation.

To effectively complete this reflective journey, you will need approximately 30 minutes. Download the guide and take your time to read through it. Take some time to think about the questions and write your answers down. There are 3 sets of 3 questions. In completing them they beg answers from you that should lead to action on your part. Remember what actions you identify and implement them in your workplace.

For groups and teams



There is great power in teams and groups when they openly debate and agree a new or improved way forward.

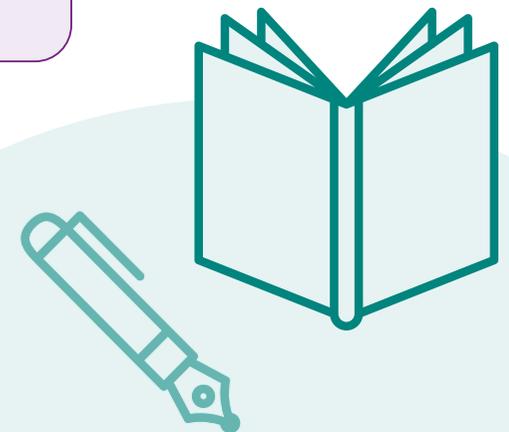
The guide in sections or overall can be used by teams and groups to jointly reflect on the speaking, listening and hearing up culture of the environment they find themselves in.

At a team meeting or as an element of a development programme use the guide to deliver a structured discussion that leads to agreed actions that will improve the openness of your organisation's culture.

PAIR and SHARE



One way to encourage an open culture is to discuss your experiences and insights with a colleague. Pair with a colleague and simply have a conversation 'out loud' about what might be on your mind. Use the Guide and complete the reflective questions together as you discuss them.



Introduction

The world we live in has always presented questions and dilemmas. Our experience includes the people around us and the impact they have on us. Not everybody sees things the same way. Who can we speak up to, who should we listen to, what should we speak up about?

That is true in all aspects of our life but perhaps it has particular importance in the workplace. We offer up many reasons for not speaking up in the work place. Equally we can often believe that we are listening when in fact we are not hearing. Our biases and perceptions of who we should listen to prevent us from hearing what we truly need to hear.

We need to be more open, to speak up, listen up and hear each other to the benefit of all employees and the organisation overall. Simple to say maybe, but harder to do.

This reflective guide is designed to help you understand the dynamics of speaking, listening and hearing up.

It is provided by The Guardian Service, the only truly independent staff liaison service in the UK. The Guardian Service make a substantial contribution to creating and maintaining an open culture in its client's organisations, ensuring the voices of staff are heard.

“
**When the whole world is silent,
even one voice becomes powerful**”

- Malala Yousafzai, Activist

Did you know?



90%+ of formal grievances happen because someone did not listen



The UK has one of the highest rates of unhappiness in the workplace



Why is speaking up important?

An open culture where people feel empowered to express opinion, debate issues, provide insight and perspective, is the starting point for an organisation to grow and succeed.

A speak up and listen up culture is about much more than competitive advantage. It provides the basis for an organisation's integrity and authenticity which, ultimately, define its reputation and sustainability.

The importance of getting this right, is best illustrated by examples of those who have got it wrong. Closed organisational cultures mean people do not feel able to speak up, and the consequences are severe. For example, at the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust people died because of a closed culture. This resulted in the Francis inquiry which has led to the Freedom to Speak Up movement.



Other high-profile examples include:

- Volkswagen's emissions scandal as of June 2020 cost the company more than \$33.3 billion in fines, penalties, financial settlements and buyback costs, and various government and civil actions are still ongoing. All of this because of a closed culture where people did not speak up
- Harvey Weinstein's abuse of women - crimes that were covered up by a closed culture for years before speaking up led to his conviction and jailing, the bankruptcy of his business and the creation of the #MeToo movement.
- Barclays Chief Executive Jes Staley campaigned to reveal a whistle-blower, rather than deal with the issue raised. For his actions he was fined £642,430.00 by the Financial Conduct Authority and had £500,000.00 of his annual bonus clawed back - a total cost of over £1.1 million.

It is not possible to quantify the damage to trust and reputation in each of these cases. And there are many more examples. That's why it matters to ensure that everyone in your organisation can say what needs to be said and the organisation can hear what needs to be heard.

KEY FACTS:



100%

of problems are known to frontline staff

74%

of problems are known to team leaders

9%

of problems are known to team managers

4%

of problems are known to executives

50%

have an idea to improve the organisation but not said anything

8%

of the workforce know something that would damage the reputation of the organisation but have not told anybody

Why don't people speak up?

We are less likely to speak up when we fear being perceived negatively, fear recrimination or victimization, fear for career, fear of impact on pay, fear of being fired, fear of being denied access to training and development, fear of legal consequences.

Figures show that females appear to be more guarded in both formal and informal interactions. Speak up and listen up is gender biased. In fact we believe or pretend that social biases don't impact our listening and unless we address this issue we are unlikely to change the negative impact. Job titles and perceptions of seniority, also have an impact on our decision to speak up. Most junior employees feel too intimidated to speak up in formal settings.

Board members and executives are seemingly unaware of how formidable they appear to more junior colleagues, particularly when it comes to speaking up and believing they would be heard.

Senior executives actually believe that junior colleagues speak up about issues of malpractice when in fact, survey results indicate that junior staff are largely reluctant to do so. Where speaking up could make a difference, people can often feel 'it's not in my job description' or their opinion doesn't matter.

An open culture encourages everyone to speak up. And it encourages innovation, creative thinking, problem identification, and greater productivity from people who work within the organisation. An open culture where everybody can speak up and be heard is not just good practice, it is an imperative.



Speaking up is STILL gendered - Female respondents report that they are more guarded in formal meetings, informal interactions and one-to-ones with the boss than their male counterparts



Two primary reasons for not speaking up - fear of being perceived negatively (37%) and fear of upsetting or embarrassing others (31%)



The meetings that we spend so much time in are when we are at our most guarded - this is where we don't say what we really think - executives spend up to 23 hours per week in meetings



34% of employees do not speak up because of a fear of retribution



Please turn page to complete Reflective Exercise

Why don't people speak up?



Reflective Exercise

1. Do you feel you part of an open culture currently?

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2. What more could you do to help people speak up around you?

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3. When was the last time you sought to resolve problems through conversation? What was the result?

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Why do we not hear?

It is true that you need to be brave to speak up but equally, you need to be brave to listen and to hear what is being said. The conscious and unconscious biases we develop affect the way we listen, who we listen to and who we may ignore or dismiss.

These biases are real and we all have to constantly question ourselves about them. It is wrong to assume as an individual that we are bias free. Studies indicated we all have a high opinion of our ability to listen up and a mindset that 'it is them not me.' At work there is a tendency to think that it is my line manager or executive leadership who are not listening. We forget to look at ourselves to see that listening is a two-way street.

Line managers have a significant role in determining the success of establishing a speaking up and listening culture within an organisation. Unfortunately many line managers send mixed signals about their approachability, and we can all have a propensity to act defensively when receiving feedback.

Equally, Senior Executives often believe they have superior listening up and speaking up ability and they perceive any communication problems to be the responsibility of others. This is an unconscious bias that they need to confront. At every level, confronting these conscious and unconscious biases is essential to make listening up effective.

KEY FACTS:



91%

of people value their peers' opinions more than those more junior or senior to them

55%

take account of body movements

33%

note the voice tone/modulation

7%

listen only to the words in communication

Unconscious bias which abounds in the workplace is not recognised to impact listening up.

The more senior the individual, the higher their opinion of their listening skills. Which can mean people regard any problems in communication as being the responsibility of others.



Please turn page to complete Reflective Exercise

Why do we not hear?



Reflective Exercise

1. Do you consider yourself a good listener - Why?

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2. Give an example where you have listened and it made a difference

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3. How could you make changes that will enable you to listen better?

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Will you act differently now?

Providing safety for freedom to speak-up opportunities is something we can all do. You can support this process by finding ways to speak up yourself and encouraging colleagues to speak up.

We can all help build an open culture where it feels safe to share views, and to recognise and celebrate our differences. You gain insight and much needed transparency of where problems might lie, but also see what works well and what does not. This may ultimately lead to preventing the failure of an organisation or even save a life.

Speaking up could protect an organisation's ability to operate and to deliver its services reliably. Speaking up helps reveal blind spots in the frontline, in the processes and/or corporate systems. The speaking up and listening up dynamic is a two-way deal. We all seem to believe that we are great listeners and that our managers, customers and colleagues are the ones who are not listening. If everyone challenges that belief and looks to their own listening, the impact could be huge.

Senior leaders declare they have an open-door policy and if people are not choosing to speak up to be heard – it is because they have nothing to say. Forgetting that their position in the organisation can be scary, especially to those in the frontline who are more junior.

These individuals may have an idea that could solve problems. All organisations need to take an active communications approach to spotlight listening-up and speaking-up. This is the first step to cultivating an open-culture and sharing the responsibility equally with everyone in the organisation.



Rule of the St Benedict monks – the head of the monastery listens to the youngest monk



Your relationship with your boss is fundamental in shaping your 'conversational habits'. People don't leave organisations they leave bosses



Many of the best ideas come from junior employees at the frontline, closest to the customer and seeing first-hand potential issues and possibilities. However, they are most likely to stay quiet impacting innovation, customer service and health and safety

“**Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen**”

- Winston Churchill



Please turn page to complete Reflective Exercise

Will you act differently now?



Reflective Exercise

1. What in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good listener in your organisation? What is it about them that makes them a good listener?

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2. What is preventing an open culture where you work?

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3. How can you encourage changes that lead to more speaking up and listening up?

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Find out more

The Guardian Service is proud to be the UK's leading provider of independent and confidential staff liaison services. We work with our clients to drive the open and positive culture essential to long-term organisational success. We know that the staff experience is reflected in the customer experience.

We passionately believe in the principles of an open culture at the organisational, team and individual level. It makes sense - why wouldn't you as an individual speak up and why wouldn't any organisation listen up and hear what needs to be heard?

If you wish to find out more about The Guardian Service, please visit www.theguardianservice.co.uk

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