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# SPECIAL REPORT

## THE 5 MOST COMMON MISTAKES MANAGERS MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM



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For Managers and Supervisors

# Introduction

Being a manager or supervisor is a vital role in any organization. In addition to having your own workload, you are tasked with the enormous responsibility of helping your employees successfully achieve their objectives. The higher you climb in the organization, the greater the demands, but too often the support you receive becomes less and less. You are expected to accomplish great things and to figure out how to do it all on your own.

I designed this Special Report to help you avoid five common mistakes most managers and supervisors make as well as to help you enhance your performance. **If you are making the mistakes described in this Special Report it is not your fault.** These pitfalls are the result of numerous myths and misinformation that have been handed down in the workplace and most have gone unquestioned until now.

The insider secrets shared in this report will allow you to quickly and easily improve leadership, teamwork, staff retention, and enhance overall productivity. The topics covered in this report are much more than tips for effective communication. The information contained in this report will help you to think differently which will lead to new actions and enable you to bring out the best in yourself and your employees.

# Mistake #1

## Listening Unconsciously

Listening is arguably the most important part of communication and yet we barely think about it. Most of us are unconscious to how we listen. We take listening for granted.

### **How you listen shapes and influences absolutely everything you encounter**

I want you to think about a person who works with you or that you oversee. Write a one to three word description of that person.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Your description is how you listen to them. Your description of them is an opinion or judgment. It is your perspective. It is an assessment based on your interpretation of the facts. Every time you interact with this person, this assessment filters your experience of them, and influences what you hear, what you say, and it even influences what the other person will say to you. It doesn't matter if your assessment is positive or negative; it shapes and influences the communication.

For example, let's say you have an employee Joe, and your assessment of Joe is that he's lazy. Now imagine you are meeting with your staff, including Joe, to assign work that is critical to your company's success. How does your assessment of Joe effect how you'll listen to Joe? How does it influence your expectations of Joe? What if Joe mentions a potential roadblock to the fulfillment of a goal? How likely are you to take Joe's comment seriously rather than dismiss it as an attempt by Lazy Joe to get out of work? Now imagine instead of lazy you believe that Joe is a back stabber. Now how will you hear his suggestion? Lastly, imagine that you think Joe is a hard working, team player. How does that impact how you'll respond to his suggestion?

I'm not suggesting that you totally lose the ability to hear good ideas independent of your opinions of people, nor am I suggesting you shouldn't make assessments of others. The key here is to become aware of how you listen to others and how your assessments made over time impact how you listen and act toward them, and in response, how they listen and act toward you. Have you ever been with someone who thinks you are awesome? How does that influence how you act? Doesn't it make you feel empowered just to be around them? You find yourself naturally wanting to contribute more. Now imagine being with someone who despite your best efforts has a low opinion of you. How do you act around them? Careful? Guarded? Now, think about a time when you have spoken to someone who is a know-it-all. What is that like for you? Were they listening to you? How did their knowing it all impact your speaking? Was it comfortable or uncomfortable?

When you listen unconsciously, allowing your opinions to go unquestioned, you are being a know-it-all. You already "know-it-all" about the person you're in conversation with and the result is you aren't really listening. You already know what they are going to say and how they are going to act. People are uncomfortable trying to talk to a know-it-all and usually give up. You have to ask yourself, is that how you want people to feel around you?

**If you want to bring out the best in your employees  
you must choose to listen consciously.**

First, you have to determine the way you are currently listening to the person. The easiest way is to write the person's name and next to it write a one to three word description like you did above; the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of them.

Next, begin to appreciate that the description is your opinion, not the truth.

Finally, consciously choose another way to listen. Some examples of ways to listen are listening to learn, listening to connect, listening for

greatness or brilliance, listening for excellence, listening from appreciation or listening for commitment.

Conscious listening is about controlling your inner dialogue and truly being present to the other person. People act in accordance with the listening they are provided. We are unaware of the powerful boxes we create for people to live inside of just by how we listen to them.

Conscious listening allows for a whole new level of conversation to emerge. People become enlivened and their natural creativity and enthusiasm are unleashed. Try it and you will be amazed at the results!

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## **Mistake #2**

### **Focus on Fixing What's Wrong**

Yes, it is a mistake to focus exclusively on fixing what's wrong. This is not about being positive or negative. This is about what you focus your attention and energy on. One of our fundamental ways of thinking about life is to see what's wrong and fix it. Doesn't it sometimes seem like you're always looking for the next problem to solve?

Don't misunderstand, there's nothing wrong with fixing problems. I'm not questioning the validity of that way of thinking, I'm simply pointing to what often goes unnoticed – looking for what's wrong and fixing it is just one way to think. In others words, when you see a problem, does it ever occur to you that you're the one who's seeing it. You're the one deciding that it must be dealt with. You're the one focusing the attention of your life, and how you spend your time. In the moment, it doesn't seem that way though, does it? It seems like there is a problem and it should be solved.

Again, there is nothing wrong with fixing what's wrong, it's just not the only choice and it's certainly not your most powerful lever to achieving what you want. Additionally, fixing what's wrong or the problem-solving model tends to leave people feeling defensive and defeated because intuitively they know that only focusing on fixing what's wrong isn't leading them to where they want to go.

There is a more effective and empowering way to increase performance and productivity and it is not mindless happy talk or stroking people's egos. It is a powerful methodology for causing and sustaining positive change that is being used worldwide in numerous organizations and producing extraordinary results. It is called Appreciative Inquiry.

Put simply, Appreciative Inquiry is the study of what works. So rather than asking "What's wrong?" Appreciative Inquiry seeks to discover the source of success or the essential elements when things are working. **Appreciative Inquiry recognizes that the questions, "What's wrong?" and "What do you want more of?" each lead to fundamentally different answers.**

So rather than find out how to fix low morale Appreciative Inquiry studies the source of employee engagement (which is what you really want more of). Rather than assume a recipe approach to success, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on discovering the times when you were most successful and asks what was present that allowed for your best to emerge. Once you discover the source of your success you can do more of it in the future, thereby enhancing your ability to succeed. Being successful does not equal studying failure and then doing the opposite. Being successful begins with studying success.

It is not that problem solving is bad and Appreciative Inquiry is good. Each leads to different outcomes. One major difference between problem solving and Appreciative Inquiry is that with problem solving there is a sense of already knowing how to get the result. With Appreciative Inquiry the assumption is that we don't know the answer, that there is something new to discover which will lead to a whole new way of doing things that cannot necessarily be predicted.

Appreciative Inquiry begins by asking questions about the times in the past you had the experience or result you are looking to create. For example, if you want to create a high performing team, each person on the team would be interviewed and asked to share a story of a time when they were part of a high performing team. What were the details, what made it possible? What was it about the situation that allowed their best to emerge? You listen for common themes and then work to create those conditions for the team.

Or you might want to help your employee be more effective or successful. In this case, you could begin by asking them to share stories of their most successful experiences. As they share the details, listen for themes and patterns. What was true about all those times that brought out their best? Once you know this information you have the elements that are necessary for their success. All there is to do is to assist them in creating those conditions and watch them soar!

In the end, there still are going to be plenty of times when what's needed is to fix the problem. The mistake isn't relying on the problem-solving frame; instead the mistake that managers make is to rely on this way of thinking like it's the only way of thinking. Beginning instead with the question, "What do I want to have happen?" opens the door to possibility and creativity. And by its very nature, it's not designed just to fix what's broken, it's designed to do what you hope solving the problem will do - give you what you want.

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## **Mistake #3**

### **Assuming They Have All The Facts**

Imagine that you had a very large piece of paper with a line down the middle splitting the page into two columns. The column on the left is labeled DATA and the column on the right is labeled ASSESSMENT.

Data means the facts and assessment is everything else – your feelings, opinions, interpretations, beliefs, etc. Now imagine that absolutely everything in your life, past and present, fits into only one column or the other.

When you begin to see these two columns you see we really live in two worlds. There is reality i.e. the facts and then there is your perspective about reality. Most, if not all, of the time we live as if there is only one world – our assessments are reality. We act based on the assessments of the facts we see and we unconsciously fill in the blanks to give our assessment more credibility.

One very important piece to this puzzle that we are unaware of is once we make an assessment, it limits our ability to see contradictory facts. It is as if we put blinders on and our field of vision narrows to only allow us to see more proof of what we already believe. For example if you have an employee named Sue who has been late back from lunch five times in the past two weeks angering the employee who covers for her you might assess that Sue is inconsiderate or not a team player, or passive aggressive.

Once you have your assessment, let's say inconsiderate, you then start noticing other instances that resemble inconsiderate to you such as failing to wash out the coffee pot when taking the last cup, changing the thermostat without asking others. The evidence starts piling up. When you speak with Sue, you are not talking about her behaviors. You are talking about your conclusion about her behaviors. You added each fact up and made it equal "inconsiderate." "Sue is inconsiderate" becomes not just your reality; it's reality. Your conversation with her is focused on helping her to be more considerate. You are acting as if you have all the facts without noticing that the mind (in it's very mischievous way) has filtered out a huge amount of data. You didn't notice how she made coffee for the whole office or when she stayed late to cover for another employee. By communicating as if your conclusion is true, Sue likely will become defensive, argumentative, feel misunderstood, etc.

A far more effective way to handle this type of situation is to assume there is data you do not know or cannot see given your perspective. Discuss the facts first and leave your opinion out of it. Here are some samples of things to say:

Sue, I noticed that you were late returning from lunch five times over the last two weeks. Can you tell me what happened?

I need you to be on time from lunch, how can I support you?

You were on time five times in the last two weeks, what worked on those days?

By dealing only with the facts, there is less chance of disempowering your employees and a greater likelihood that you will learn something to help you help them.

Whenever you are unsure what is data and what is assessment (it gets blurry sometimes), get a piece of blank paper, draw a line down the middle to make two columns. Differentiate between the data and your assessment. This will help you to get clear about what there is to discuss and the best way to approach the conversation.

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## **Mistake #4**

### **Too Many Transactional Conversations**

I'd like you to think about conversations as being on a spectrum. On one end is Transactional Conversations. Transactional Conversations are directive, one-sided, informational conversations. Basically, like a monologue delivered to an audience. The underlying intention is to get compliance and or to deliver information.

At the other end of the spectrum is a Transformational Conversation. This type of conversation broadens the awareness and shifts the

perspective of those involved. Change occurs in a Transformational Conversation as shared understanding results. A Transformational Conversation leaves people engaged and owning the conversation.

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Transactional Conversations	Transformational Conversations
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It is not that one is good and the other is bad, or that one is right and the other is wrong or even that one is better than the other. They are just different. The intentions for each are different, the experience of each is different and perhaps most importantly the outcomes for each are different.

On any given day we may fall at various points on the spectrum. Typically though, the primary mode of conversation in the workplace, especially between manager and employee is Transactional. It is the one we are most comfortable with. Here are a few examples of Transactional Conversations:

Get the bucket and clean up the spill in aisle 10.

I need you to get over your personality differences and work with Joe on this project.

The company has a new policy regarding personal items in the office. As of Monday, they will no longer be allowed.

Use of sick time for doctors' visits is acceptable.

Please take care of writing the report and have it to me by Wednesday morning.

Transactional Conversations are necessary and serve a purpose. The biggest mistake that managers make is that they only have Transactional Conversations. An over reliance on this type of

conversation often leads to people being frustrated because they feel talked at (not with), left out and disengaged.

There needs to be a balance between Transactional Conversations and Transformational Conversations. You need to think about the outcome that you want to have and decide which type of conversation is appropriate. If you have to deliver a challenging communication or you want people to change their mind, adopt a new point of view, get on board with a new policy, or engage their creativity, then a Transformational Conversation is probably in order.

Although most people have experienced a Transformational Conversation at some point, by and large, they are not sure how to create the conditions for a Transformational Conversation to occur.

Here are some guidelines for having a Transformational Conversation:

- Listen consciously (see mistake #1) – choose how to listen.
- Create a context for the communication; explain the rationale or basis for the perspective.
- Allow yourself to engage in the conversation without trying to control or manipulate the outcome.
- Let go of the idea that there is “one right way.” There is not one right way to do virtually anything.
- Listen as if the person you are talking to will say something brilliant at any moment.
- Be open to having your mind changed. It is ok to change your opinion once you have new information.
- Appreciate the other’s point of view and thinking style.
- Notice the balance of speaking and listening.
- Give people space for their reaction (rather than react to it).
- Come to a shared understanding. Be sure to ask what people heard and discuss any discrepancies.

## **Mistake #5**

### **They Aren't Building a Future**

Let's face it; most of us are so incredibly busy we barely have enough time to breathe. We get caught up in the day-to-day chaos and craziness of our work. In response, everyone talks about having a vision of the future, but it's become commonplace for people to roll their eyes when someone says, "Let's create a vision for the future." You need to have a vision for the future, but where most managers falter is they are not actually building the future. Typically, the reason for ignoring the future is "My gosh, it would be nice, but we don't have time!" What we don't realize is that most of the things that are filling up our to-do lists are a product of yesterday's thinking. What's on our plate today is a product of what we built in the past and so if you're spending the vast majority of your time focused on the demands of today, fundamentally you are living in the past. You are solving yesterdays' problems hoping for a better future rather than creating and building the future you want to experience in reality.

Still, building a powerful future begins with having a vision. A primary role of a manager or supervisor is to be a leader; to engage their employees, not only in their functions but to engage their minds as well. Having a clear vision of the future is essential to fulfilling on this role.

If you're experiencing a lot of stress, frustration and feeling like you're being pulled in a thousand different directions, chances are you don't have a powerful vision of the future. Creating a vision of the future is not some "new agey" pointless exercise. Having a vision provides clarity and power. You're not just blowing in the wind responding to the needs of the day aimlessly. You're going somewhere!

Your vision of the future gives you your experience in this moment. To illustrate this point, imagine that tomorrow you were leaving on a two-week all expense paid luxury vacation to your favorite

destination. Now imagine that instead, for the next two weeks at work you will be short staffed and will have to cover several additional positions as well as complete an important report for your boss. Each of these scenarios creates a distinct experience in this moment despite the fact that neither is happening now and neither is real.

### **That is the power of a clear vision.**

As a manager, having a clear vision is just the first step in the process of actually building the future. Nevertheless, creating your vision is essential for your development and for the development of your employees.

### **Here are the elements of a powerful vision of the future:**

1. It creates a fire in your belly, i.e. you really, really want it.
2. You do not know how to make it happen.
3. You cannot do it alone.
4. You will know when you accomplish it, i.e. you have some measurement or standard.
5. There is little to no evidence that your vision is possible in the current reality.

### **How do you create a powerful vision?**

1. First, get clear on what you do not want. Make a list.
2. Second, recognize creating a future is not about fixing or improving what already exists. It is about inventing or building something brand new.
3. Third, imagine falling asleep tonight and waking up five years in the future and everything is exactly the way you most want it to be. What would it look like? Spend some time reflecting on what you really want.
4. Fourth, create a one to two line description of it, stated in the present tense. Here are some examples:
  - First in sales for the entire company
  - Recognized leader in industry (need measure)

- Largest bonus in the history of the company
- Cohesive team generating breakthrough results

Make sure that whatever it is, the mere thought of it gets you psyched!

### **You have a vision, now what?**

This is where the real fun (and work) begins. You start by creating a game to achieve it. Remember this is not about fixing or improving what you already have; this is about building something new. Are you going to be able to actually build it every moment of every day? Of course not, there are still the demands of today to fulfill. What you'll notice though when you've created a powerful vision of the future, it creates the context for everything you face. It will inform your decision about everything including those things that are a product of the past.

If you commit to actually building your vision of the future, it will require you and your staff to begin to operate at a whole new level of performance. The best part is that it is exciting and energizing and even fun to play this new game. So many of the things that looked important or crucial prior to creating the vision suddenly become insignificant and in many cases, irrelevant.

When you stop playing the old game - focusing on surviving what was created yesterday while hoping for a better future - and start playing the new game - creating the future you really want and building the structures necessary to make it happen, a whole new rich world of possibility becomes available to you.



Now that I have described the five most common mistakes and how to avoid them I am sure you learned something new or were reminded of something you had forgotten that will help you to achieve your objective of being the best manager or supervisor you can be.

When you are aware of the five most common mistakes and how to avoid them you can quickly and easily bring out the best in your employees, which will positively impact productivity and performance.

In these difficult economic times, doing more with less is adding enormous stress on everyone in the workplace, especially the managers. Bringing out the best in your employees is essential to reducing stress and ensuring the success of the organization.

If you would like more information or training in any of the above or other topics related to effective communication, leadership, teamwork, staff retention, or improving overall productivity, we are here to help.

Please visit [www.YourCommunicationAuthority.com](http://www.YourCommunicationAuthority.com) or call 1-888-330-8288.

## About the Author



Called, "America's Leading Communication Authority for Managers and Supervisors," Lisa Giruzzi specializes in assisting organizations to empower and engage their employees to be more effective and productive through successful communication.

Lisa has more than 20 years experience coaching and consulting others. She is the owner of the consulting firm Transformational Conversations, co-owner of Appreciative Inquiry Consulting and a co-founder of The Creating WE Institute.

Lisa is the author of the newly released book, [31 Days to Transform Your Life: A Daily Action Guide for Increasing Joy, Satisfaction and Fulfillment](#) and the Co-author of the Amazon bestseller, [42 Rules for Creating WE: A Hands-On Practical Approach to Organizational Development, Change and Leadership Best Practices](#).

Lisa's new book, [Bringing Out The Best in Your Employees: The Ultimate Guide for Managers and Supervisors for Empowering and Engaging Employees to Be More Successful and Productive Through Effective Communication](#), will be available spring 2010.