

For Permanent & Positive Change

# The Exchange

**FEATURED TOPIC: CONFIRM UNDERSTANDING**

## How Do You Know You Understood

So often when someone is talking to us, we might shake our head in agreement and turn to leave because it is obvious that we have received the message. That scenario is like the receiver who sees the ball coming right to him, so he turns to see how he is going to run with it, thus, dropping the pass. In football, you get four chances to make ten yards. In life, you may only get one chance to get it right.

Your brain is constantly scanning information and sorting it into similar categories. This occurs without conscious thought. It is very similar to hearing the first three notes of a song and guessing the title. When conversations matter, slow down the process. So what if you think you already know the song? Let the person sing. You may find out you were wrong.

Here are some tips to slow you down:

- » Keep your lips together and breathe through your nose. It is very hard to interrupt this way.
- » Place your body in a relaxed position. If sitting, this could be leaning back in the chair with feet apart and your elbows on the arms of the chair. Standing could be feet shoulder-width apart with one thumb tucked into a pants pocket.
- » Using your own words, rather than the ones you just heard, repeat back your understanding of what the person said.

Slowing down only takes a minute or even thirty seconds in some cases. It usually takes longer than that to correct a misunderstanding. If you don't have time to listen patiently, don't listen at all. Explain to the individual that you cannot listen now and quickly get a time scheduled when you can listen. It is far better to postpone listening than to half-listen.

## What Our Clients Are Saying

"Out of all the training classes, the TLC class was the only training class that I still use today, and I also use it in everyday life. It has helped me communicate more efficiently with others. I have received a better response from people because now I understand why they respond the way they do since taking TLC training."

Paige Stout, Change Management, Atlanta, GA

Understanding what another person means is the key to connecting with them. Most words have at least five different definitions in the dictionary. Which one is the speaker using? If you think it can't make much of a difference, think again.

Verbs and adjectives carry a lot of emotion in the message. To confirm understanding, reword those verbs and adjectives to ensure you've got it. For instance, if a person says to you, "We need a big sale now!" and then goes on talking, you could confirm, "So, our department will meet our target goal by selling \$100,000 by the end of this week, right?"

Whenever another person is speaking in long or complicated messages, re-state what you understood them to say, before you take action. This requires a little extra time on your part, yet it can save a big misunderstanding and the time it takes to correct it. When you let the other person know what you have heard and they agree, you know you have understood. ❖

## Why Do We Say, "And That's the Bottom Line?"

The saying, the bottom line, is the ultimate statement when confirming. Whenever the bottom line is said, you know that whatever comes next is all that's coming next!

As common as this statement is used today, few know where it originates. The bottom line is a financial term. It derives from an account ledger book. On one side of a divided sheet are the assets, on the other side the liabilities. After subtracting the liabilities from the assets (which

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### Looking Forward

Our next issue will focus on Keeping Employees Happy.

### Looking Back

You might also be interested in our November 2006 edition: [Asking the Tough Questions](#) or read other [previous issues of The Exchange](#).

*"The vision of things to be done may come a long time before the way of doing them becomes clear, but woe to him who distrusts the vision."*

Jenkin L. Jones

## For Permanent & Positive Change

### Ask For Confirmation

Some people are very hesitant to interrupt, comment, or question. In the United States, this addresses approximately 40% of the population. When you give directions to someone who doesn't comment or question, you may think they are in full agreement or understanding and your job is done.

Hold on. Better to make sure than to find out later that they were confused and just didn't ask you a question. One way to accomplish this is to simply request the person to give you their understanding. You may say, "Just to make sure we're on the same page, what is your understanding of what needs to be done this week?"

Now your job is to listen carefully for the details. If the person uses vague terms, ask for clarification, such as, "When you say 'more', what amount are you talking about?"

If words do not bring understanding, use visuals. Drawing your idea on a piece of paper can help to solve misunderstandings even if you use stick figures and crooked lines.

Sometimes it takes time to reach understanding. An investment of time at the front end will certainly help the bottom line. (See article in this issue on Bottom Line.) ❖

### Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday to our clients celebrating in December:

- » Brian Baker
- » Khadir Paden
- » Lachon Graybill
- » Charles Pelcher
- » Steve Walker
- » Ricky Francis
- » Margaret Fox
- » Daniel Sklar
- » Bob Lehmann
- » Rick Rowell
- » Rebecca Quigley
- » Phil Sanford
- » Lori Taylor
- » Doug Manggrum
- » Andriette Turner
- » Jayanth Manay
- » Misty Tate
- » Bruce Hulse
- » Robert Thomas
- » Aaron Dean
- » Robert Max
- » Susan Hopper
- » Debra Johnston
- » Lee Doan

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could include numerous entries resulting in long columns), whatever is the last (or bottom) number is what is earned or owed.

Often to determine a quick financial status one would look at the books and only view the bottom line. Based on that number, you would make your financial decisions.

Although confirming understanding may include several factors, once you know the bottom line stand firmly behind your decisions and hold others accountable. People may doubt what you say; yet they will remember and hopefully respect what you do.

And that's the bottom line. ❖

### Ask The Experts

Dear TLC,

There is a member of my team who avoids meetings where he is responsible for any shortcomings of the department. I have brought this to his attention twice and each time he brushes it off by saying, "I meant to attend but got bogged down in work," or "Was that meeting today? I'll try and catch the next one."

I am not his boss but do feel obligated to say something to him because his lack of confirming his priorities with the team is causing us all to look bad. What can I do to ensure he stands by what he's supposed to do?

Getting Fed Up

Dear Getting Fed Up,

Ask this person how aware he is that his missing the meetings is negatively affecting the team. Remember to listen more than you talk. Based on what is said, let him know that his absence leaves the team misinformed, which negatively affects them. Next, ask him what he can do to make sure he attends every meeting and keeps everyone involved. If his absence continues, follow the next two steps:

1. Talk with the other members of the team. Collectively let this person know that the team is prepared to go to management unless his behaviors change.
2. If he *still* continues, report the actions (not your feelings) to management.

### Helpful Hints

- ✓ Give options when someone is being unclear about confirming.
- ✓ Tell what you will do if they do not commit.
- ✓ Have a back-up plan in case they continue to be non-committal.

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*"There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction."*

John F. Kennedy

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## For Permanent & Positive Change

### Minimizing Maybe's

Vincent Ivan Phipps

What do you do when you want a simple yes or no and you are only given wishy-washy answers like; "maybe", "we'll see", "I'll try", or "I guess so?"

Vague answers like these can cost time, money, resources, and bring you unnecessary drain in your emotional energy. The solution is to use the following confirmation process:

**1. Identify ambiguous wording** (non measurable words or phrases):

ASAP, a little while, not too long, pretty soon, etc.

**2. Ask for clarification:**

When they say, "Maybe I'll have it done by Monday."

You say, "By what day are you certain you will have it done?"

When they say, "I will give you an answer very soon."

You say, "Will you provide an answer by 5 p.m. today?"

**3. State alternatives or contingencies:**

a. If you are unable to have it done by Monday, I will cancel the agreement, discontinue payment, and seek another vendor.

b. Considering this is due Wednesday at 10:00 a.m., if you are unable to finish by Tuesday, I'll expect you to come in at 7:00 a.m. Wednesday morning to ensure this is complete before the deadline.

Follow these three steps and you'll have a definitive plan the next time you need confirmation. ❖

### Featured Service: Learning to Listen

Therese Padgett

Too often we take language and other interpersonal skills for granted. Babies learn to talk, but first they learn additional means of communication. They learn what "hot buttons" to push to get what they need. To learn what these hot buttons are, they become very observant of human behavior and particularly notice how others react to what they themselves do. In effect, they master the art of reading body language.

Unfortunately, as language skills develop we often become less dependent upon reading body language. Motor skills and constant questioning prevail for a while. Toddlers become experts at asking the infamous "why" questions that drive parents

insane. Curiosity rules the day. Only when they discover the dissatisfaction of hearing too much of the single word, "because" do they withdraw from this behavior. As we all know, some children are not so easily discouraged.

They should not be; and neither should we as adults. When our questions are not satisfactorily answered, we need to learn how to persistently rephrase our questions so as to elicit an answer. The nuances of this process include the ability to do so without creating defensiveness in the other and to be able to read body language and voice qualities so as to determine the level of sincerity in the answer we receive.

The willingness to listen is implied when we ask a question. However, being willing to listen is not all it takes. We need to know how to listen. Think about that for a moment. Of all the skills we have been taught, when was the last time we had training about how to listen? Other than "sit at your desk," or "don't interrupt when another is speaking," or "children should be seen and not heard," what real training do we ever receive about how to listen? For most of us the answer is none at all, or at best, very little.

Listening is a subject expertise of the communication coaches at TLC. Two formats for the training are offered as individual coaching or as a group seminar. The listening exercise utilized is very revealing of one's strengths and weaknesses as a listener. Before the exercise, most people think their skill level is somewhere between 75 and 90 percent. They are surprised to find it is actually closer to 25 to 35 percent.

If you are being paid to listen and hear (and most people are even if not in a job description) in order to respond appropriately, it is important to improve your listening skills. Please give TLC a call at 1-888-BECAUSE or visit our web site at [www.talklisten.com](http://www.talklisten.com) to explore your training options. know that you are on track.

At TLC, we often say that listening makes you smarter. Listen first so that your conversation lasts. ❖

### Chief Officer's Opinion

Beverly Inman-Ebel

If you have ever taken a seminar or coaching from me, you know that I readily share my mistakes with clients. I reveal my blunders with you, in part, because I don't want to be put on

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#### Remember To

- ✓ Use "yes" and "no" questions to confirm understanding.
- ✓ Clarify vague terms by adding measurable words.
- ✓ Ask what they can do instead of what they will try to do.

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*"There is, however, a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue."*

Edmund Burke

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*"Your job gives you authority. Your behavior earns you respect."*

Irwin Federman

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*"Truth can be outraged by silence quite as cruelly as by speech."*

Amelia E. Barr

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any pedestal, and also because I hope you can learn from my errors. Often my tribulations are funny, and this one is no exception.

My best friend hurt her hip and, for weeks, I went over to her house daily to feed her cat, clean the litter box, and do little tasks to help. I noticed that cat hair was collecting all over the carpet and furniture and when I mentioned this to my older son, he volunteered to vacuum for her.

He completed his housework while my friend was at the physical therapist office. He locked up the house thoroughly, including pushing the taped-over button lock that had no key to it, and left to play disc-golf with his friends and brother. When my friend returned, she did not have a key to the lower lock on the door and was, thus, locked out of her house, so she went to her mother's house. She was unable to reach my golfing sons who had turned off their cell phones. My husband was no help because he was on a crutch and in a cast with a broken leg. Just before dark, I returned home and learned from my husband that my friend was trying to get one of the boys to crawl through the kitchen window that was not locked. With this small amount of information, I decided I would go to the rescue.

I loaded my ladder in our truck and drove over to her house just as the sun was setting. Of course, no one was there. I was glad that the next door neighbor recognized me because it would have been obvious to any onlooker that I was up to no good. Ladder in place, I pried off the kitchen screen which was no small feat since I had no tools with me. Okay, I put a small puncture in the screen using the nozzle of the hose. After celebrating my cleverness, I discovered that the window was not unlocked as I had been told.

That is when I noticed that there were two kitchen windows. Did I mention that these windows are the high narrow style? This screen was more difficult, but I finally got it off with the use of a metal garden stake. The slight bend in the frame was hardly noticeable. To my delight, this window was unlocked. The next trick was getting my body through the narrow opening. I used my cell to call my friend and asked her how an adult was supposed to get through the tiny opening.

She remarked that she thought my younger son could fit through it. When I exclaimed that I was smaller than his six-foot plus frame, she remarked that I was wider. I was really glad about the dent in the screen frame at that point. My friend said she was coming over to help. I was determined to do this myself.

That was when it started raining...hard. At the top of the ladder, I raised up and flopped my backside onto the window sill, knocking over the ladder. Now I was really motivated to get through the window. I moved all of the items on the kitchen counter below the window and wedged myself through until I landed backwards without a broken bone.

It is difficult to describe my jubilation at my success. I had never attempted to break into a house and I did it despite all the obstacles. (Although I think the wet jeans helped me to wedge my body through the window frame.) Once inside, I started singing, "I'm so good. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da. I knew that I would be." With all my gyrations, I did not realize that I had crossed the security beam setting off the alarm. I knew this alarm system was connected to the police because I accidentally set it off last summer and they came.

My brain froze. Neighbors started advancing towards the house. I realized that I had emptied my pockets before entering so I had no key to unlock the deadbolt and no way to get out of the house. The cat took one look at me and hid under the bed. It is quite amazing that I did not get thrown in jail, as all visible and audible signs pointed out that I was an intruder. How did I get myself in such a mess?

Quite simply, I did not confirm my understanding before I set out to be the hero. When we do not make sure that we have the information that we need, the results can be alarming and intrusive. It all ended okay and I knew instantly it would make a great story. Next time though, I will ask more questions. Ask. Confirm. Live your dreams. ❖

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*"Whatever you do,  
do it to the purpose;  
do it thoroughly, not  
superficially. Go to the  
bottom of things. Any thing  
half done, or half known,  
is in my mind, neither  
done nor known at all.  
Nay, worse, for it often  
misleads."*

Lord Chesterfield

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*"We know what happens  
to people who stay in the  
middle of the road. They  
get run over."*

Aneurin Bevan

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*"Delay always breeds  
danger; and to protract  
a great design is often to  
ruin it."*

Miguel de Cervantes

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TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by e-mail [tlc@talklisten.com](mailto:tlc@talklisten.com) or phone 1-888-232-2873. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

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