



Mobley's Musings— Turning Down the Volume

When I graduated from college, the Environmental Protection Agency offered me a job researching noise pollution. My task was to take a large sound-measuring device into fields with cows and assess the impact of the airplanes flying over their fields. Anyone who knows me well is probably saying, "I can't see you in that job!" It was wrong for me on so many levels. But times were tough, and jobs were not plentiful.

Today I still struggle with noise pollution. When I'm working from home, construction in my neighborhood, garbage trucks, dogs barking — all create a maddening cacophony. When I'm at the office, the sound of others talking on the phone or holding meetings can derail my train of thought. Thank goodness for my noise-cancelling headphones.

But what's worse is the noise in my head reminding me of tasks I need to do or saying critical things like, "Why haven't you finished that project yet? You don't know what you're doing. What were you thinking?" Until someone invents voices-in-my-head-cancelling headphones I've learned to corral those voices, so they don't keep distracting me from the task at hand. I write down all the ideas, to-dos, and random thoughts running through my head, prioritize them, and get back to work. I make sure I take time to breathe and calm my mind. By turning the volume way down on those noises, I am more focused and productive.

Have you ever noticed that when you're in your car and looking for an unfamiliar address, you reflexively turn down the volume on whatever your car's audio system is playing? It's the same principle: when you need to think, noise pollution disturbs your mind. So, the next time you're having difficulty focusing, turn down the noise and create a quiet place inside and outside your head.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

There is Power in Silence

While many clients struggle with not speaking up enough, others don't know how to use silence to their advantage. They talk too long, say too much, and don't allow time for people to raise questions or give feedback. By filling every bit of time and space with their words they can seem more junior than they really are.

When you've said what you had to say and ask for feedback, remaining quiet connotes that you really do want to hear feedback. Asking a question and allowing time for others to think about the question will bring more and possibly better responses. It also gives introverts time to think about what they want to say.

In sales negotiation training we learned that the person who speaks first will ultimately get the short end of the deal. I remember going on a sales call with a colleague. After we presented our recommendations, the client asked for a price. I gave the price and sat quietly, allowing them to think about it. Uncomfortable with the silence, my colleague blurted out, "If this is too high, we can reduce it." I kicked him under the table and said, "We can revise our offer to match your budget." Fortunately, the client wasn't concerned about the price and accepted our initial offer. But reducing the price before the client even has a chance to reflect on it shows a lack of confidence and can kill the whole deal.

When making a big request, whether for more resources, more money, or a promotion, being able to sit quietly and wait for a response shows conviction and confidence in what you are asking for. I also use a pause when presenting to increase attention to what I'm about to say or to underscore the importance of what I've just said. This "pregnant pause" means I want my point to sink in.

Notice how you assess leaders who pause and those who don't allow for silence. Which one do you want to be?

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Building Relationships with Senior Leaders

For various reasons, so many people feel reluctant to reach out to senior executives in their organization. But their reasons are, in fact, assumptions. They assume these leaders are too busy, don't want to waste time with them, and wouldn't be interested in what they have to say.

Yes, senior leaders are busy, but many appreciate the opportunity to mentor others and share their wisdom. Like any executive focused on results, they want their dealings with others to be meaningful and productive, and above all they don't want to do all the work in the relationship. The more you prepare for conversations with them and show initiative, the more willing senior leaders will be to meet with you.

The first step to establishing a relationship is selecting an entry point, keeping in mind that one approach does not fit all. Think about the values, interests, and competences you respect in the leader. If you've noticed they have a unique ability you'd like to develop, you could ask if they'd be willing to share their approach.

Sherri noticed a senior executive in her company was especially effective at lessening tension when parties disagree. Wanting to be more competent in this area, she made notes about how the leader handled these situations and approached him for more tips. She shared her notes on what she had observed him doing, which impressed the leader and demonstrated her genuine interest. The leader went on to fill in some elements she had not noticed, giving Sherri a fuller, more methodical understanding of his approach. She expressed her appreciation for his time and insights and asked if she could check in with him once a month for follow-up ideas and feedback. The leader agreed and their relationship has developed to the point where he now shares advice with Sherri on a wide range of issues.

Another approach is to ask a senior leader to help you understand how the project you and your team are working on fits into the organization's overall strategy. Explain that you can increase your team members' motivation if they understand the bigger picture.

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