



The art of listening

The *Learning Principal*, by Kay Psencik, Frederick Brown, and Stephanie Hirsh, is Learning Forward's latest book in a series focused on putting professional learning at the heart of improvement for leaders, teams, and systems. The book is full of practical tools, many of which are useful for leaders at multiple levels, including principals.

In the April 2021 issue of *The Learning Professional*, we shared a tool about implementing change effectively. In this issue, we're featuring a tool about effective listening skills.

Chapter 6 of the book homes in on the role leaders play in providing feedback and coaching as well as the skills they need to fulfill that role effectively. Listening is one of those core skills. As the authors write, "Effective listening skills are a prerequisite to success in the coaching

ABOUT THE LEARNING PRINCIPAL

The Learning Principal: Becoming a Learning Leader supports school leaders in developing a learning orientation to each challenge they face, ensuring they are ready to identify solutions that put students' equitable outcomes at the fore.

Chapters cover principals' roles and responsibilities related to designing professional learning, implementing curriculum, managing change, leveraging feedback and coaching, maximizing resources, and more. Online tools complement each chapter.

Purchase the book through Learning Forward's bookstore at learningforward.org/store.

role. When principals are listening from others' perspectives — listening to understand, listening without judgment or obligation to solve the problem or without having to be the expert — they give individuals and teams space to struggle with an issue, experiment with new ideas, and determine their own learning paths" (p. 88).

The following tool can help principals, coaches, teacher leaders, and others deepen their listening skills "so that individuals and teams begin to think in new ways, question current practices, and reflect about the impact of their work on student learning" (p. 89).

PRACTICING COMMITTED LISTENING

Purpose	To increase principal effectiveness in listening.
Recommended time	2-3 hours for initial practice
Materials	Listening Guide, p. 70
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="387 655 1396 795">1. This tool is designed for the principal. The principal may want to share it with others after completing some of the exercises in it. <li data-bbox="387 795 1396 1110">2. Consider this: Listening is a difficult skill to develop in our modern world of sound bites and tweets. Your goal is to practice listening throughout an entire conversation. Don't interrupt or offer your advice or opinions. Your disposition is: "I am listening to you. What you have to say is the only thing that matters." Reflect on what you are learning about the other person and about yourself. <li data-bbox="387 1110 1396 1381">3. Go to the school library, media center, or cafeteria and sit with students. Just listen. Do not make judgments about the students, their assignments, their teachers, the cafeteria, or media center. Note what you are learning by listening. Practice listening like this often. <li data-bbox="387 1381 1396 1675">4. Attend a learning community session in your school. Just listen without judgment. What new observations are you making about the team by being in their presence and listening? About team members? About the trust among team members? About their interactions? What is different about you when you simply listen? <li data-bbox="387 1675 1396 1919">5. Use the Listening Guide on p. 70 to determine the quality of the listening that you do and guide goal setting for improving your skill as a listener.

TOOLS

LISTENING GUIDE

DESCRIPTOR	REFLECTIONS	PERSONAL GOAL
I listen carefully to what is said without interruption — refraining from comment, commiseration, and offering assistance — until the person is finished. When the person seems to be done, I inquire, “What else?” to make sure the person has fully spoken on the subject at hand.		
I convey nonverbally my full attention and interest in what is being said.		
I minimize my use of statements or questions that direct the conversations or subtly convey a point of view. I trust that people will reveal to me as little or as much as they wish.		
I genuinely honor the speaker’s views even though I might not agree with them. I am working on listening, not defending my position.		
I refrain from analyzing what has been said and why it is being said so that I am fully engaged with, and respect, the other person.		
I reflect on the skills I am developing as a listener and recommit to my practice of becoming a powerful listener.		
<p>Adapted from <i>Leading for Results: Transforming Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in Schools</i>, 2nd edition, p. 71 by Dennis Sparks. Copyright 2005 Corwin.</p>		