

CEO INSIDER

with Robert J. Daino, WCNY President & CEO



Listening as a Leader

Listening as a Leader? What does that actually mean? What does it mean to you as a person? What does it mean for your organization? Professionally? It's something different for everyone and is certainly important. Listening is important to be successful in your organization, and for yourself as a person. We sometimes take it for granted. We think we hear things. But, do you really hear what's being said?

I can relate a story that happened to me at one of my previous jobs that was very important to me, I was really engaged. I had a manager that was very hard to get something positive out of. One day he called me over and said, "Daino, I have good news and bad news, which do you want?" I said, well, give me the bad news first. He gave me the bad news, and then turned around and walked away.

I was stunned. I said wait a minute, wait! I asked him for the good news. He turned around and invaded my space and said, "you didn't listen, I said I had good news, and bad news, which do you want? Not which do you want first?" To this date, he never gave me the good news.

That was a defining moment for me in my career, one that I took to heart. One that makes me listen, very very closely, every single day of my life. To date, I think I hear things that other people don't. Which ultimately allows me to do things that other people can't because of the things I actually hear. It's really important. It sounds easy, and should be easy, but for whatever reason it's not. Active listening, really looking. When someone talks stare at them, listen, and focus. Sometimes what isn't said is the loudest. Pry and ask questions. Really important.

Here at WCNY we do that as an organization. I ask people to do it; I push people to do it. We never use the "a" word here. We never assume, we always ask and we always listen.

Just recently, we launched two new TV channels here: GLOBAL CONNECT and WiCkNeY KIDS channels. That all came out of listening. We listened to all of the people we serve in our 19-county viewing area and beyond with the digital world.

We had nearly 500 people contact us using all of our media: social media, e-mails, phone calls, one-on-one interactions about our new channels: concerns, happiness, wishes, wants. Every one of those calls and interactions were very important, to know are we hitting the mark? Are we delivering what we thought we were? It was very motivating to see our entire organization servicing the community we serve.

What did we set out to do to begin with? We didn't go into the back room at WCNY and decide what was best for the community. For a broadcaster it's quite easy to determine what we are going to deliver because we have this so-called big mouth. What's important to us is to ensure that what we are going to deliver is right to begin with so we want to use our big ears and listen to you, the community at large.

We did that. We asked questions, using surveys, talking to the community that comes into this building each and every day, understanding what are we lacking? What can we do better? It's always great to hear the things we do well, but it's even better for us to hear the things we aren't doing so well. It's important to hear it from you.

So based on all that feedback, we created these new channels, and launched them. We got a lot of great feedback. But we also got feedback that said we didn't do so great in certain areas.

For instance, there was some content that was lost when we replaced those channels. That content was important to a whole set of people out there, such as Classic Arts Showcase and the PBS NewsHour repeats that were displaced. We listened, we didn't ignore. We acted. We figured out how to bring those two pieces of content back in another way without hurting what we just launched and solved those problems as we should. Because this station, a community-owned station is for you.

By using the skills of listening, and not closing our minds and thinking "hey what we did was right or this is what we ought to do." We kept our ears open, we didn't keep a pride of ownership. We wanted to engage with you, owners of this community-owned station, and we acted.

We encourage you to interact with us to ensure we always deliver the best we can. That's an important thing to remember, whether with WCNY or anyone else, personally and professionally. Communicate, listen, and be open and honest. Always step back after you do something and self introspect. Continue to communicate back and forth. Ask: Did I achieve what I set out to do? Am I hearing what I think I am hearing, not what I want to hear? And should I react to the message that I just got back.

If you think you are doing the best you can, then that's what counts. Always be open to hearing the unfiltered message. The unfiltered message counts in terms of YOUR filter too. Don't put a filter on the message that comes into your ears. Then you will always be able to do the right thing, and the best thing that you listened to.