

## **Pay Attention to Your Attention**

Are you good at multitasking? Many leaders are, and the fact is, they have lots of priorities and decisions to juggle, as well as office phones, cell phones, desktop computers, laptops, and/or iPads with all kinds of messages jangling for attention.

Yet with so many clamoring stimuli, do you consider your degree of attention toward others, either in large-group or one-on-one settings? Those you meet with notice if you're giving more attention to the text message that just vibrated your phone than the person in front of you, and you are sending a message about what is most important to you.

Instead, consider this ground rule: whatever you are doing in the moment, be fully present for it. By giving others the power of your attention, you send a clear signal: "You matter to me, and this topic is important to me."

### **Ideas for Action**

As a leader, what you say or do matters immensely to those around you—especially to those who report to you. Just as you expect the full attention of your direct reports during one-on-ones or team meetings, so, too do they seek and deserve your undivided attention when presenting information or soliciting your opinion. Be sure you are not shortchanging them by being more responsive to a text message than to them.

Many leaders underestimate how much others pay attention to everything they say and do. You've probably had the experience of someone saying to you, "Well, you said that..." and being shocked to know that your seemingly offhand comment somehow became gospel. It's a hard lesson. A newly promoted senior leader said to me, "You mean I have to watch what I say now—I can't be myself?" Yes, you can be "yourself," but that doesn't mean you can say everything that occurs to you. Your words matter a lot; others may repeat them or act on them.

Your comments, actions, and body language convey powerful cues to others, who look for congruence. For instance, consider the CEO who proudly espoused an "open-door policy" and a desire to hear from others, but then communicated the exact opposite by having his office door physically moved so that his assistant would be anyone's first touch point. That was a message! Or the leader who spent much of her division meeting regularly checking her iPad in front of her team and answering e-mails, sending a tacit signal that distractions matter more than her team.

Eye contact is powerful. We generally don't think about eye contact as being a leadership skill, but I think it is. You can either get someone to keep talking or be quiet through eye contact or lack thereof. How long do you wish to keep talking when the person opposite you is scrolling through their e-mails? Conversely, how valued do you feel when the person opposite you looks you in the eye and acknowledges what you say?

Upon his passing, the late Minnesota Twins slugger Harmon Killebrew was eulogized by fans and players alike, not just for his prodigious home runs, but even more for the attention he bestowed on those around him. "He was a consummate professional who treated everyone—from the brashest of rookies to the groundskeepers to the ushers in the stadium—with the utmost of respect. I would not be the person I am today if weren't for Harmon Killebrew," said fellow Hall of Fame player Rod Carew.



I know some senior leaders who have banned open laptops, cell phones, and iPads from their meetings. Their mantra is, “if you need to step out to make an important call, do it – but don’t destroy the importance of this meeting by being only half here.” That’s a clear message about showing up and paying attention.

The word communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning “to share.” By sharing your attention with others, not only do you enhance the exchange of information, you set a positive example for others to follow. You have a chance, minute-to-minute, to show who and what is important to you. What’s your choice? For more Pearls of Leadership Wisdom, [Visit Here](#).