



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

Interruption Disease is all around us and is negatively impacting communication and creativity at work and at home. Read this month's newsletter to find out if you have interruption disease and how to overcome it.

Overcoming Interruption Disease

Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.

*- Dr. Karl Augustus Menninger,
Psychiatrist*

Many of us are plagued by interruption disease and may not be aware of it - talking over the other person, not letting them finish what they are saying. In short, interrupting! You know you have interruption disease when you find yourself:

- Asserting your own position at every opening in a conversation (or in some cases, not waiting for an opening, just cutting the person off);
- Telling the speaker what to do before fully hearing them;
- Assuming that you know what the speaker is saying before they've finished and coming in with your own ideas and suggestions;
- Finishing the speaker's sentences for them in the belief you are 'helping' them to express themselves;
- Knocking down an idea as soon as the person expresses it;
- Making critical or judgmental faces or sounds.

Interruption disease can lead to a whole stream of problems and challenges. It not only reduces our effectiveness as a listener (an important skill of any good leader) and negatively impact relationships, but can shut down communication and creativity. Interruption disease potentially leads to people you are talking with to not feel respected by you, having their thinking and brainstorming inhibited, and/or having them possibly withhold information out of caution or anger.

Interruptions will often steer a discussion into a familiar area for the listener, depriving the other person

of the chance to tell the whole story or share their complete thinking. Discussions hindered by interruptions often end with those involved going away with different views about what has been said.

Interruption disease stifles creative thinking. Innovative solutions to problems and new methods of doing business are incubated by listening. When you interrupt and tell someone exactly how to do something, interrupt their thinking or stifle their ideas, you will miss out on any improvements that someone might have discovered by applying fresh eyes and unique background to solving the problem.

So how do you fix interruption disease? The eight ways described below are not all inclusive however offer a good start. Choose one idea that resonates to you directly at the moment and try it out.

Eight Ways to Stop Interruption Disease

1. **Kick the interruption habit.** When we are talking, we are not listening. The goal is to develop the habit of not interrupting. If this is a challenge for you, ask a buddy or coach to work with you, pointing out when you do it and providing you with feedback when you have been successful in kicking the habit.

Also, remember to close your mouth while listening. You might not be audibly interrupting someone, but by opening your mouth you may be signaling to the other person that you are ready to talk. Try imagining that you have a drop of crazy glue on your lips keeping your mouth closed.
2. **Make it about them.** Sometimes we need to "get over ourselves" and our need to look good or get our point across first and give the other person the time and space to express their ideas and thinking. Seek first to understand the other person and put your focus on them. Instead of adding your comments every twelve to fifteen seconds, let the speaker talk for thirty to sixty seconds without interrupting. In some instances, it may be beneficial and helpful to remain silent for a minute or two without interrupting.
3. **Lose your 'but.'** When a 'but' comes out of your mouth following a quick paraphrase it is most likely that you have not been listening. It is most likely you have been formulating your opinion about what they are saying. The key is to open your mind to everything the other person is saying, hear it all, and then formulate your thoughts and comments. Eliminate 'but' from your vocabulary - using the word 'but' has the same affect as interrupting.
4. **Manage your excitement.** When we get more 'excitable' we tend to interrupt. When you are like this, take extra care to wait, breathe, and manage your energy so they the speaker gets a chance to develop their thoughts and ideas.
5. **Manage distractions.** When you're in conversation with someone and feeling distracted, stop. Acknowledge your distraction and ask them to repeat or clarify what they said. If the issue on your mind is preventing you from giving them the attention they deserve at this time, explain that and set up another time when you are likely to not be distracted.
6. **Pay attention to autobiographical responses.** Whenever you find yourself asking intrusive questions which involve probing, evaluating, advising or interpreting, apologize and ask the speaker to start over where they were before being interrupted. When you think they have reached a stopping point, say something like "May I make a suggestion?" before you start to make sure they are ready to give up the floor.
7. **Write it down.** It is a known fact that our brains operate much faster than others can speak causing us to have thoughts and ideas pop up while the other person is speaking, hence causing us to interrupt. If this happens, write down the thought quickly and continue listening. When it is your turn to talk, raise it then.

8. **Cultivate an environment free of interruption.** At IDEO, the company's leaders seek out the creative voice of their team by encouraging team members to listen to one another in order to build a work environment that promotes cooperative teamwork and the rapid development of innovative solutions. For example, during brainstorming sessions the rules of "No critiquing and debating" and "Have only one conversation at a time" are posted on the walls and followed.

What's the Bottom line

To be a better listener and to foster creativity we need to stop interrupting.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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