



Do They Really Listen and Learn?

By Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

Do you sometimes believe that your employees (and children) are not really listening to you? As your children reach adolescence and your employees are no longer new in your company, they naturally become more independent from us. We must trust that the earlier lessons we taught them will now come to fruition in practical ways. Here's a quick illustration. It has always been our commitment to have one of us home for the boys when they return from school, particularly when the boys were younger. However, several years ago I needed my husband Jim to drive me four hours to an out-of-state speaking engagement during the school week because I had been speaking all day. I had made all the proper arrangements with the school, bus system, and our friend Eileen to watch our boys. Drew was a third grader at the time. After school, Drew dutifully tried to get on the correct bus so that he could get to Eileen's home. The bus driver refused to let him get on, so Drew dutifully got off the bus as he was told.

Eileen's fourth-grade daughter Jackie was distraught when she arrived home – without Drew. She told Eileen what happened. Eileen called the school office and to her dismay Drew never went back inside the school. Our older sixth grade son, Bryan, was already at Eileen's house after middle school. Eileen, who is now panicked, asks Bryan where he thinks Drew might be. Bryan very nonchalantly replied, "I don't know, but I'm sure he'll make a good decision."

In fact, while Eileen backtracked and drove to the elementary school to try and find Drew, Drew arrived breathlessly at Eileen's house. He was really mad at the bus driver and he ran the mile to Eileen's house to try and beat the bus there. Although every time when the boys leave the house and we tell them to have a great time and "make good decisions," they had never repeated those words back to us. We assumed it was falling on deaf ears. But, when it really mattered, they believed they could make good decisions because of all the times we had trusted them to do so.

With employees, taking the time to get employees to think and problem-solve takes more time in the short-term. But, ultimately it will take far less time long-term. If you consistently ask, "Jane, what do you think you should do?" After the third or fourth time, Jane will not come to you anymore. She'll be thinking, "If I ask the boss, s/he is just going say, so, give me two options. What do you think? How should you handle that customer problem? Never mind, I'll just figure it out on my own." Excellent. Jane is beginning to show that she needs little control and can make good decisions. I can learn that I have more and more trust in her.

Our biggest fear with employees is the cost of bad decisions or choices. The reality is that employees will make mistakes. The question needs to be – are they learning from their mistakes? Or, do you just write Jane off and think, “I knew I couldn’t trust her. From now on when she comes to me, I’ll tell her exactly what to do.”

Do you believe the same is true for your adolescent child when they make a mistake? Hopefully not, because they’re just “kids.” We expect children to make mistakes. The problem in our minds is that Jane is an adult. She should “know better.” So, whose fault is it that Jane didn’t know better? IF you did a great job with Jane when she was a new employee (Phase 1 in Leadership) and you told her exactly *what* to do and *how* to do it and then moved her on to Phase 2 in Leadership where you explained the *why* and helped her with the *what*, then you will be ready in Phase 3 to collaborate with Jane in deciding on the *how*.

Often, we don’t know whether or not our employees are “getting it.” We need to let loose of our control and give our employees the opportunity to gain our trust. It’s only then we can test the greatness of our employees.

*Excerpted from Patti Hathaway’s book, **Secrets for Unleashing Employee Greatness: The Step-by-Step System to Maximize Every Employee’s Greatness**, 2005. Patti Hathaway, CSP, **The CHANGE AGENT**, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*