

PATIENT LEADERSHIP

“Love is patient ...” – I Corinthians 13

Patience is about your relationship with time. As a servant leader, you take time to listen and understand situations; you avoid making hasty decisions or losing your temper. You recognize that everyone has their own learning curve, and allow time for learning to happen. You behave with acceptance and self-control in the face of challenges.

Patience is not complacency. As a leader, you can't overlook or ignore problems. You address problems directly, but show patience in how you deal with them.

Key Actions for Being Patient

- **Listen and take time to understand.**

Show the signs that you are listening to others.

Signals that you are listening include:

- Making eye contact
- Nodding your head
- Taking notes on what is being said
- Expressing verbal cues, such as yes, mm-hmm, uh-huh, etc.

Avoid showing the signs that you are not listening.

Signals that you are not listening include:

- Interrupting others while they are talking
- Checking your phone or looking at your computer screen
- Physically turning your face or body away, looking away from the person speaking

Clarify and confirm your understanding of what others have said.

- Withhold expressions of your interpretations or judgments until you have a thorough understanding.
- Ask questions to show interest and clarify your understanding.
- Repeat back what you have heard and summarize key messages, then check for understanding. (*“Am I understanding you correctly?”*)

Label the intentions behind your conversation, and help others label theirs.

Leaders often have people bringing them problems, but listening breaks down when you jump to conclusions or intentions are misinterpreted. By labeling your intentions – and asking others to label theirs – you can better understand. Sometimes people want others to:

- Listen and empathize only: *“I’m just venting my emotions; I don’t need additional help.”*
- Listen and advise me: *“I need your insights and advice on a problem I’m dealing with.”*
- Listen and take action: *“I need a solution, and also need your help implementing it.”*

Key Actions for Being Patient (continued)

- **Don't get upset when things go wrong.**

Things don't always turn out as planned. When things go wrong, people look to their leaders for stability and guidance. Being overly reactive and showing your emotions impulsively can give others the impression that you are rash or unpredictable in the way you lead. With practice, you can show greater patience through emotional intelligence.

Give yourself permission to pause.

- When you feel provoked or anxious, take a deep breath – or several deep breaths – and give yourself a moment to collect your thoughts.
- Remember that making an impulsive decision sometimes leads to regrets. When you feel tempted to interrupt someone or take immediate action, remind yourself that it is okay to think before you act, and consider what alternative actions you could take.
- Not all situations require an immediate decision; sometimes you need to do a little research, or just need the evening to think things over. When necessary, it's fine to request more time or an additional meeting.

Maintain self-control and practice appropriate manners.

- Don't yell, interrupt others, or try to talk over them. Let other finish speaking and practice your listening skills to help them feel heard.
 - Practice a calm demeanor and an open posture, and keep your eye contact and hand movements steady.
 - Don't storm out the room – sit down and finish the conversation before you exit.
 - If you must feel your emotions, label them and take responsibility for them. Describe how you are feeling with some objectivity. Don't use emotions as an excuse to act impulsively.
- **Support others' growth, and allow time for it to happen.**

Acknowledge the learning curve.

Leaders recognize that learning takes time. When someone on your team is just getting started, or has to take on some new responsibilities, you can't expect them to be proficient right away. You demonstrate patience by taking steps to support their growth, and by acknowledging a realistic amount of time to gain the knowledge or skill needed.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"I remember learning how to do this, and it's okay to let it take some time."*
- *"This is a process, and we are going to take it one step at a time."*
- *"You're doing great and making progress. I have no expectation of perfection, but I do expect you to continue to grow and develop, and get better at this over time."*