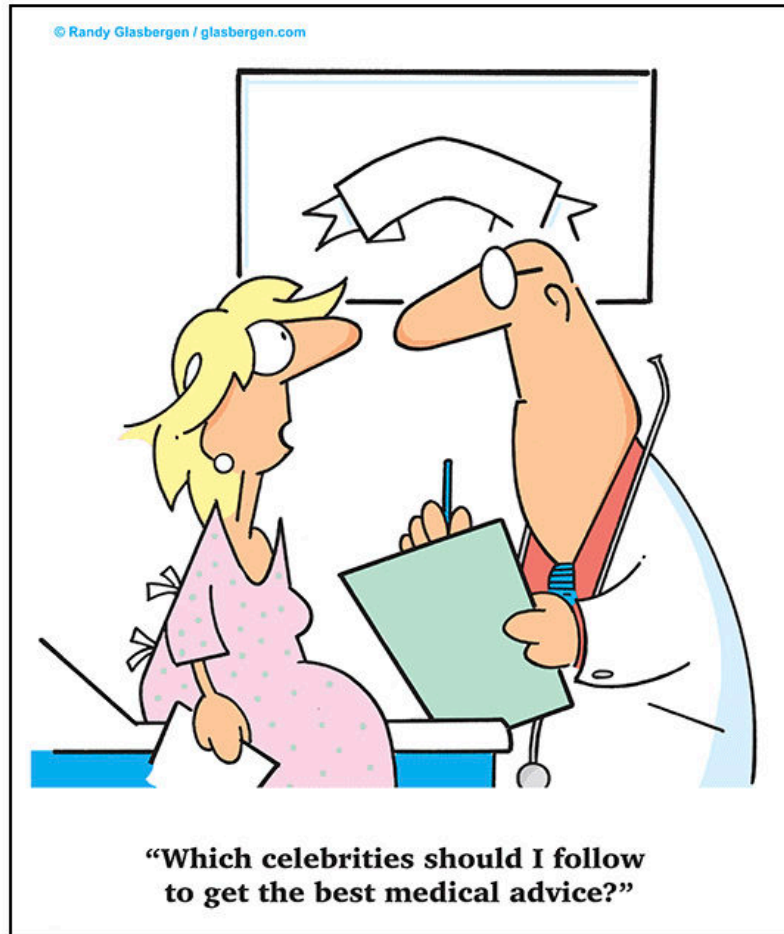


Leaders: carefully choose who you listen to



Feedback is a gift, so I want to hear what people are thinking and feeling about my organization and my leadership. I have multiple feedback mechanisms in place to make it easy for stakeholders to share with me their thoughts.

But there are some voices that I listen to more intently than I do others; not all voices have equal influence. To lead well, listen to everyone, but be selective as to who's input you allow to shape policy and key decisions.

Apply this principle both when people give you unsolicited input and when you actively seek information.

I choose to listen to:

- Wise people. Some people are more insightful than others. Their discernment may be intuitive or it may have been developed. I have a retired IBM executive in my organization who, for most of his consulting career, analyzed organizations and helped them negotiate structural changes and personnel alignment. His training and experience has rewarded him with insight and wisdom.
- People who are deeply committed to your organization; they've been involved for a long time and they care about its wellbeing. We have a strong leadership team in my organization that is led by an elected president who serves a one-year term. I have created a President's Council comprised of the past ten presidents. These men and women have demonstrated their love for our

organization. They are a brain-trust of caring and committed people. I listen to what they say.

- Qualified people who can provide “fresh eyes” on your organization. These people don’t have a history with your organization so their thoughts are more objective. You can solicit voices outside your organization (consultants) or you can seek the input of people who have recently joined your organization (this window of opportunity is available for about six months; after which people become assimilated into the culture and lose their “fresh eyes”).

I don't pay attention to:

- Simple, narrow-minded people. Many people have a very limited view of the world. They live in a small spectrum, suffer from myopia and are intellectually stagnant.
- People who have a specific agenda. Some people don’t consider the well-being of the entire organization but are focused on a minute area.
- People who are negative and oppositional. It doesn’t take much insight or effort to be the resident critic.

I recently asked my staff to list characteristics of people they choose to listen to and those they choose to ignore. Here’s the list.

I listen to people who:

- Choose their words carefully and only speak when they have something meaningful to say
- Love people and seek the good of the group
- Have earned my trust over time
- Straight-talkers
- Lead by example
- Good listeners
- Rational
- Seek advice from others
- Successful in chosen field
- Have demonstrated seasoned wisdom
- “Add up”

I don't listen to people who:

- Are self-promoting
- Don't follow through and finish tasks
- Make excuses
- Are close minded
- Undisciplined
- Selfish and self-centered
- Overgeneralize and are shallow
- Liars
- Demonstrate foolishness
- Judgmental and critical

Develop your own criteria and abide by it. Better yet, make a list of people whose thoughts and opinions you value. My list includes: Jonathan, Lauren, Sarah, Chuck, Charlton, Phil, Francey, Sandi, and others.