

Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

A STORY ABOUT LISTENING



Friday midday. Normally, the hall breathes a sigh of relief at this time. Today, it seems as if it has forgotten how to exhale.

It's the little things that make me wonder: fewer jokes, more silence. Shift changes without eye contact. And that phrase I've heard three times in the last two days: "It doesn't matter anyway."

Non-committal statements don't appear suddenly. They develop gradually. They are the beginning of quiet quitting. And once they're there, no slogan will help.

I could give a speech now. Show the numbers, explain the direction, and shout "We can do this!" into the air. I know these tools. They work when a team is merely tired, not when it's resigned.

The coach once said, "When motivation is gone, listening is the fastest way to the truth." Back then, I nodded and thought I was already doing it. Today I realize: I talked a lot, organized a lot, explained a lot. But I didn't really ask any questions.

I put a note on the break room board without much fanfare: "Friday 1:30 pm – 30 minutes of listening. Questions only, no solutions."

It feels strange to write something like this down, as if listening were an event. But perhaps that's exactly what's needed: a space that doesn't happen in the background.

At 1:30, ten people are standing in the break room. Not everyone, but enough. Some are leaning against the wall, arms crossed. Skepticism. Tiredness. A bit of a "Let's see what happens" attitude.

I don't stand at the front, like in a meeting. I stay in the middle, at eye level. No notepad in my hand, just a pen.

"I don't want to sell anything today," I begin. "I want to understand. Three questions. Answer as honestly as you can. I won't discuss. I'm just writing things down."

They look at me. Not dismissively, more tentatively.

"First question," I say. "What is currently draining the most energy from you?"

Silence. I notice a part of me getting nervous: If no one speaks now, it'll be awkward. I breathe against it. Hold the space.

Then Tobias says, more quietly than usual: "The constant replanning. I no longer know what my day will look like in the morning."

Miriam: "That we have no influence, but have to bear the brunt of everything."

Sven: "Goals are rising, but there aren't enough people. That's infuriating."

I'm writing this down. No comment.

"Second question," I say. "What would have to happen for you to be able to say again: 'I enjoy working here?'"

Jule laughs briefly, without joy. "Honesty towards those above."

Marco: "A plan that works. Fewer makeshift solutions."

Tobias: "That someone says that this isn't normal right now. I have the feeling we're supposed to just keep quiet and push through."

I write, I feel the room gradually becoming warmer – not through harmony, but through reality.

"Third question," I say. "What do you want from me as your leader?"

That's the hardest one. Because I can't control it. And because everything that's said here ends up with me.

Sven looks directly at me. "Say stop sooner, Lea. You're carrying on for too long and then expecting the same from us."

Miriam: "Protect the breaks. When there's a fire, we'll sacrifice them first."

Jule: "And if you don't know something, say so. Then we don't have to guess."

Marco adds after a moment: "And address it more quickly if someone is chronically overloaded. We see it, but sometimes we don't dare to bring it up."

Something inside me tenses up at the last sentence.

Not as a defensive reaction, but rather as an insight: Yes. Exactly. I often hoped for too long that it would "get better on its own".

I'm still not saying anything. Just "Thank you." And I mean it.

Finally, I look at the list. Ten minutes of pure truth. And suddenly, the weariness in the room is no longer just persistent – it can be named. And what can be named can be shaped.

"I'll take that on board," I say. "And I'll come back on Monday with three concrete things we'll change. I'll explain everything else openly. If there's something I can't solve, I'll tell you."

They nod. Not enthusiastically. But engaged.

As they leave, Tobias pauses briefly. "It was good that you just listened," he says quietly.

I smile. "It was good that you talked."

Later, I sit alone in the break room. I reread my notes. And I realize something that almost frightens me: how much I didn't know because I was too busy functioning.

**Listening isn't about being nice. Listening is about leadership.
Because it prevents people from stopping telling me the truth.
And without truth, we are flying blind.**



Takeaway inspiration

Listening

Listening is an active act of leadership: it brings the truth into the system before resignation sets in. When people experience that their reality is heard, motivation and the willingness to take responsibility grow again.

This week, take 20-30 minutes just to listen and ask three questions—without answering immediately. You'll be surprised how quickly motivation changes when people experience that you truly understand their reality.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT LISTENING FOR YOU

1. Where do I talk, because silence makes me nervous?
2. What truth do I fear if I truly listen?
3. What three questions will I ask my team next week – and just listen?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

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