

REPUBLICANS UNITED

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June 2010 Edition: *An Opportunity to Listen*

By: Rachel Woods, TFRW Leadership Development

If there is one thing we can be certain about during these uncertain times, it is that the Democrats are not listening to the people of this nation. Despite the outrage and opposition in opinion polls, Obama continues to push forward an agenda that the majority does not want. Though savvy communicators in many ways, giving grand speeches and utilizing every known communication medium on the planet, there is one fundamental communication skill that Obama and the Democrats obviously lack, and that is active listening.

We know that individuals who do not feel heard usually remain defensive, suspicious, and focused on protecting themselves. This is also the case for groups of people with shared sentiment. Many would agree that the above description fits Tea Party activists and conservatives today. Obama and the Democrats are mistaken if they believe that disaffected conservatives are going to go away by simply ignoring them. When someone's point of view is perceived to be ignored, emotions can eventually escalate. And here we are today with conservatives protesting in the streets! But let this be a warning to us as well! Many of these same disaffected conservatives feel as if the Republican Party is not listening to them either.

What Republicans want desperately is for Tea Party activists and conservatives to find their home among our memberships and to vote Republican, so that that we can remain a viable party capable of competing with Democrats in elections. However, in order for this to happen, unlike Obama, we must demonstrate that we have listened *and* respond to their concerns. As leaders, we bear a certain responsibility for the local community perception of the Party. We may be the only Republican leaders that our friends and neighbors know personally. And leaders of other groups, new and established alike, undoubtedly analyze our actions and draw conclusions about the Party. So, what specific ideas for action can help us to genuinely represent that we are listening? Here are a few ideas that you may find appropriate depending on your communication skill level and your sphere of influence:

(1) **See the challenge as an opportunity.** Our thinking drives our actions. So, rather than seeing this situation as a problem, we should look at it as an opportunity to listen in order to grow our memberships and our Republican voter base.

(2) **Ask yourself what opportunities you have to listen based on your current role.** To whom should you be listening? Remember that it is he who you need most to join you that you must first seek to understand.

(3) **When in a one-on-one talk or in a facilitated discussion with a group, listen to each party's perspective before expressing your own.** It is human nature that when our perspective is recognized by others we become more attentive, sympathetic, understanding and appreciative of other people's ideas and perspectives. Negotiation and conflict research continues to indicate that when people feel heard, they are more likely to listen. Your turn will come.

(4) **Exhibit traditional signs of active listening when in discussions.** Do not interrupt, make eye contact, lean slightly toward the person, nod your head to let them know you understand, concentrate on what is being said, clarify by asking questions and use your own words to occasionally rewind and repeat what the speaker said to make sure that you understand what has been said.

(5) **Ensure a proper environment for listening.** People are more open to providing information in a neutral trusted environment or at their own meeting. Visit auxiliary organizations to listen with an open mind, not as a spy or judge. One idea is to assign official liaisons to auxiliary organizations in order to multiply your efforts and to show your support. Questions to consider are, "What do we have in common? How do they need us? How do we need them?"

(6) **Beware of the tendency to compete.** Occasionally check your motives to make sure you are not competing with other conservative organizations unnecessarily.

(7) **Build trust and collaborate.** Set up a meeting with leaders of other organizations with the intention to build trust, learn more about their organization and to explore ways you may collaborate to achieve a common goal or mission.

(8) **Seek feedback.** Brainstorm all of the current communication mediums that exist and explore ways you and other members can use them to *receive* feedback, e.g. direct communication, surveys at meetings, online questionnaires, phone conferences, forums, etc.

(9) **Take action.** Show others that you listened by taking action in all of the ways that you can, based on feedback provided. Action indicates that listening has occurred.

(10) **Build a team of ambassadors.** No one person should carry the burden of outreach or membership development. Most Republicans share concern for the Party's unification, so build a team of members whose mission is to listen and learn, build community trust and goodwill for the Republican Party, or simply remind members that we are all ambassadors of the Republican Party.

There are many specific ways to listen. What specific ideas do you have for "listening" to our members, voters and the members of auxiliary groups? Please send your suggestions so that we can empower one another. We appreciate your feedback! Contact Rachel Woods at GOPUnited@aol.com