Coaching Tip: Effective Listening

As we have discussed before, one of the most critical elements to good coaching is active and effective listening. Effective listening makes the person speaking feel valued, like they have contributed, and like a part of the team.

Many strategies for effective listening are geared towards in-person conversations, but we all know that there are ways to be an effective listener remotely. Here are some tips:

- **Relax, but be attentive:** Screen out distractions so that the person speaking is your main focus. But don't be too intense with that focus, it can be distracting to the speaker!

- **Be open-minded:** Remove all of your filters and preconceived notions about the speaker or what they are going to say. Let the person speaking tell you what you need to know in the moment. By assuming you know how something is going to end, you could miss something critical to how you coach this person!

- **Picture what the person is saying:** This can be literal pictures of what the person speaking is describing or more abstract associations. Focusing this way on the person's words can make more of a lasting impression on your own memory so you have better recall when discussing options with your coachee later.

- **Avoid interruptions:** If you are interrupting someone, chances are you aren't fully paying attention to what they are saying. Ask clarification questions if needed during pauses, but don't jump in with solutions before someone is done talking.

- **Only ask clarifying questions:** Creating a good coaching relationship is likely going to require a familiarity achieved by having sociable chit-chat on the calls. Try and keep these to the beginning or end of the call and only ask clarifying questions during the coaching.

- **Empathize:** Try to feel how the speaker feels. Empathy nurtures relationships and it deepens your level of understanding about the situation the speaker is describing.

- **Provide feedback:** Let them know you are listening! Celebrate success and acknowledge hardship.

This coaching tip was adapted from the Forbes article "10 Steps to Effective Listening"
http://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/