

# Techniques for Advancing Mission Alignment and Unity of Effort

In time-compressed, high-stakes environments, communication is often the first casualty. Communication breakdowns can erode trust, slow decision-making, and produce work that meets the ask but misses the standard, which can cripple the mission.

Strategic Listening is an essential skill for tough minded leaders. It...

- Surfaces real problems earlier.
- Replaces compliance with initiative.
- Deepens trust.
- Improves quality and accountability.



**ALIGN:** Realign your team with the mission, empowering them to make smart trade-offs.

- Refocus the conversation on the mission and the stakes.
- Clarify your intent, sharing the purpose behind the task when you can.
- Define what success and a quality outcome look like.
- Use precise language that cuts through confusion and restores focus:
  - ≡ “Alright, let’s reset. The objective is [action/outcome].” (*specific, observable*)
  - ≡ “Let me give you the bigger picture. We need [outcome] so that the next team can [take this action].” (*mission focused, the stakes*)
  - ≡ “‘Done’ means I have a product I can trust and use immediately, one that is clearly understandable by teammates without specialized knowledge of the situation.” (*quality standards*)

**INQUIRE:** Diagnose the true barrier. Your objective is to get to ground truth.

- Listen for signals of hesitation, confusion, low ownership, or misaligned priorities.
- Treat these signals as vital intelligence that you need to go deeper.
- Adopt an inquisitive tone. A calm, analytical approach yields facts; an accusatory one yields excuses.
- Ask open-ended questions, one at a time, giving them space to deliver the information you need.
  - ≡ “Walk me through the friction points, what’s getting in your way?”
  - ≡ “What assumptions are we making here that are getting in the way?”
  - ≡ “What are you waiting on right now to make progress?”
  - ≡ “To satisfy mission requirements, what do you need from me?”

**REMEMBER:** The way you receive bad news today determines if you get it while there is still time to act tomorrow. Demonstrate that it’s safe and effective to come to you early by how you handle these conversations.

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## Strategic Listening for Mission Alignment

FROM CONFLICT TO COHESION



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**MOVE:** Here, diagnosis becomes decisive action. Your goal is to give structure to problem-solving, ensuring the subordinate owns the solution. They learn the process; you build their initiative and resilience.

- Acknowledge and pivot to problem-solving.
  - ≡ “Okay, I can see why you made that call. Now, let’s get back on track. What are our options?”
- Let the barrier guide the solution; your questions should compel them to build the plan.
  - ≡ **If the breakdown is Clarity:** Provide the missing context. “It seems the project requirements were not clear. Let’s fix that. Ask me specific questions until you are 100% certain of the required deliverable.”
  - ≡ **If the breakdown is Capacity:** Challenge them to manage priorities or propose revisions to scope. “This task is now your number one priority. What has to shift to make this happen?”
  - ≡ **If the breakdown is Authority:** Leverage your rank and influence only where they cannot. “You are right; this is outside your lane. What one specific action do you need from me to clear your path?”
- Once they have presented a viable plan, get their explicit commitment to it. Then, clearly state your corresponding action. This creates mutual accountability.
  - ≡ “Good. Your plan is to [state their plan and by when]. I trust you have that. I will [your part of the plan and by when]. Let’s get it done.”



**Strategic listening leverages your authority to move people, performance, and mission forward.**



**Strategic Listening for Mission Alignment**

FROM CONFLICT TO COHESION

