LENS Method: Leadership Effectiveness/New Strategies
Source: Institute of Cultural Affairs

Creating Trust for Good Communication
At the heart of open communications is an attitude of respect, an expression of the worthiness of the other person(s). Open communications is the outward expression of the attitude that we all have something to learn from each other. Holding back, even for the intended benefit of the others, rarely works. Sharing information – bad news, good news, rationales, projections, expectations – implies a collegiality at some level, a sense that "We're in this together." This, more than any particular bits of data, is the message that deals with the frustration over communication breakdowns.

An even more powerful way to convey the message of respect is through asking and listening activities that imply a certain trust in the other person. This trust stance carries the assumption that information and relevant data is held by every member of the organization, not just the top few. One duty of the supervisors, managers, and leaders, then, is to provide opportunities to pool the insights and information resident in each individual.

When trust and respect are in place, the numerous communication tools available can be used productively. Without this trust and respect, the tools generate more noise than communication. Open communications is the life blood of the Information Age, and like the human blood, it has to come from the heart.

Listening Tips
- **Stop talking.** To others and to yourself. Work hard on stilling the voice within – it is impossible to listen while talking
- **Look, act and be interested.** Avoid reading, doodling, shuffling or tapping while others are talking.
- **Don't interrupt.** Resist the temptation to jump in with an evaluative, critical or clarifying remark or questions before the other person has finished his/her statement.
- **Try to get inside the other's perspective.** Put yourself in his/her position – what would be your viewpoint?
- **Listen between the lines.** Try to hear implicit as well as explicit meanings. Look for things left unsaid or unexplained – ponder these and ask questions if you need clarification.
- **Use affirmative body language,** and observe the nonverbal behavior of the other to glean meanings beyond what is being said.

Asking Tips. When you wish to tap or clarify others' ideas, experience and expertise, the following questions may prove helpful, either in a one-on-one situation or a group context:
- To Clarify: "Could you tell me/us more about that?"
- To Probe: "Could you tell me/us what leads you to this conclusion?"
- To Generate Creative Thinking: "Assuming we had no constraints, what are some ways we might deal with _____?"
- To Stimulate Non-Linear Thinking: "What are some of the options we have in this situation?"
- To Promote Looking Beneath the Surface: "If we were to assume these difficulties are the surface problems, what might be some of the underlying issues?"
- To Promote Reflection on Learning: "What have we learned through our experience with _____?"
- To Incorporate Learning into Future Action: "What might we do differently next time, based on this experience?"