

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Living Here](#) / [Family](#)

Train yourself to listen, recommends office-manager mom

calcala@sacbee.com

Published Tuesday, Jun. 16, 2009

Editor's note: Few parents can claim to be child-rearing professionals. In this occasional series, we show what people have learned about parenting from their day jobs. If you have suggestions about other people or jobs to profile, let us know.

When you're an adept multi-tasker running a busy office, it can be tempting to run your family the same way.

Nadine Ludden knows that. She's not only the mother of two, she's the incoming president of the International Association of Administrative Professionals.

What she's learned – in the office as well as at home – is to listen well and not to order everyone around.

You have to listen to communicate, she said, and you have to learn to listen.

Ludden found that out when her employer, the global engineering firm MWH, consolidated some jobs.

She found herself re-interviewing for a job that included things she already did. She didn't get the new slot.

"You can have all the skills in the world, and it's not going to have as big an impact as if you get along with people," Ludden said.

She realized that not everyone thought she was an effective communicator. She worked on it and gained a recent promotion to office manager. She did it by listening.

"A lot of people hear things, but they aren't really listening," Ludden said.

Once, Ludden spoke by phone to an employee in another office. The woman said everything was fine, but Ludden sensed something was off.

She went to the other office and took the woman aside to find out what might be bothering her.

"She really just needed to talk," Ludden said. The woman ended the discussion by remarking on what an effective supervisor Ludden was.

At home, when talking with her kids, she watches their body language for cues about how they're feeling.

If they're not talking, Ludden knows something's wrong because her kids normally share with her.

"If they're not blabbing about what's going on with their day, something's wrong," said Ludden, who is separated from the children's father.

After listening to problems, Ludden doesn't just give orders on how to fix things. With the office subordinate, she offered questions and options. The employee already had notions of what to do and acted on her ideas.

"My suggestions really were her ideas," Ludden said.

Allowing kids to take responsibility for their decisions is a good idea, too, Ludden said, and that's what she tries to do with her daughter, Kiana, 14, and her son, James, who's 20.

"You need to let them have some free expression," Ludden said.

When James got to college at California State University, Sacramento, and was having difficulty with some courses, "he had to make his own decision to go and talk to someone else," Ludden said.

Although she might offer guidance, she didn't feel that it was up to her to fix things.

"At some point, you have to let go and (let them) make choices for themselves," she said.