

How to Increase Your Personal Effectiveness by Truly Hearing What Others are Saying

Upturn
POINTING YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Listening Skills



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How to be a Better Listener

For every 10 books about selling, presentation and other “talking” skills, there is less than one book about listening. Yet, when you think of it, listening is one of the most important activities we do, day-in and day-out. And the better listener we are the better results, more happiness and greater satisfaction we attract.

How Toned Up Are Your Listening Skills?

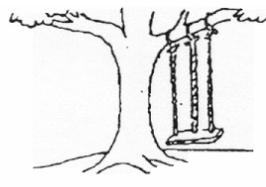
How often do you find yourself in one of these situations?

- Missing an important meeting that “no one told you about.”
- Your coworkers, family, friends and (if you’re a parent) your kids having to repeat the same information again and again.
- Constantly fighting fires or running from one problem to the next that seems to have reached a state of crisis, even though it didn’t have to.
- Learning about important information after the fact.
- Receiving tons of e-mails, memos, voice mails and other communications instead of learning the information in face-to-face meetings.

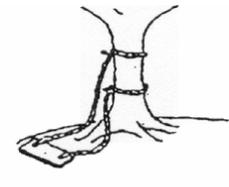
If these situations sound familiar, it may be because of your listening ability—or lack of effective listening skills. You may be able to communicate effectively, but if you don’t listen, you are destined to have problems.



AS MARKETING REQUESTED IT



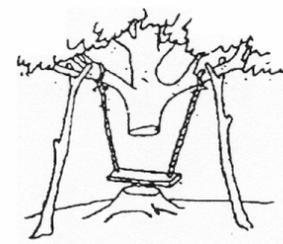
AS SALES ORDERED IT



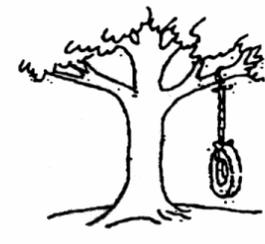
AS ENGINEERING DESIGNED IT



AS WE MANUFACTURED IT



AS FIELD SERVICE INSTALLED IT



WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTED!!!

“COMMUNICATION” MEANS SAYING AND HEARING THE SAME MESSAGE

Are You a Good or Bad Listener?

To find out how your listening skills stack up, take this simple inventory. For each of the 20 behavior statements listed below, check the ones you find yourself doing at least 1/3 of the time (or more) while listening.

- I prepare myself for listening by focusing my thoughts on the speaker and topic, and by committing time to listen.
- I ask questions about what I have just heard before stating what I have heard and understood.
- I follow the speaker by reviewing what was said, concentrating on content, and anticipating upcoming statements.
- I read emails and other documents while I'm listening to someone on the telephone.
- I observe the speaker's face, body posture, movements and vocal cues.
- I think about other topics and concerns while listening.
- I listen for what is NOT being said as well as what is being said.
- I fake paying attention to the speaker, especially if I am busy or know what the speaker is going to say.
- I show, in a physical way, that I am listening and try to help put the speaker at ease.
- I tend to listen more for the facts and details than for ideas and reasons.
- I am aware of my own vocal, facial and body cues that I use while listening.
- I evaluate and judge the wisdom and accuracy of what I have heard before checking out my interpretation with the speaker.
- I avoid sympathizing with the speaker and making comments like, "I know just what you mean, it's happened to me" and telling my story before letting the speaker know what I've heard and understood.
- I find myself assuming that I know what the speaker is going to say before he has finished speaking.

- I accept the emotional sentiment of the speaker.
- I think up arguments to refute the speaker so that I can answer as soon as he or she finishes.
- I ask for feedback about the specific words or phrases that I need clarified.
- I am uncomfortable with and usually reject emotional feeling of the speaker.
- I paraphrase or summarize what I have heard before giving my point of view.
- I am easily distracted by physical noise or by the speaker's manner of delivery.

For each of the "odd" numbered items you check, give yourself a pat on the back. These are good listening habits. The more you use them, the better your listening will be.

For each of the "even" numbered items you check, these are your listening problems. They are the actions you take that reduce your ability to listen effectively. They also make you seem "rude" and "self-centered."

12 Good Listening Habits

Listening is hard work. It takes constant energy, attention and commitment. It is the process of taking what we “hear” in the form of sound waves and making sense out of that information.

What we hear filters through our perceptions and results in an attitude or an opinion about someone or something.

Here are 12 habits of a good listener:

- 1. Look directly at the speaker.**
- 2. Ask the speaker clarifying questions** about things he or she doesn't understand or needs more information about.
- 3. Ask questions about how the speaker is feeling;** shows concern.
- 4. Repeat some of the things** the speaker says to show they've been listening.
- 5. Analyze both the “content” and the “relationship” components** of what's being said. The listener asks himself or herself what is the speaker saying in the form of information, and what is the speaker saying about the relationship between each other—or how we are going to continue or not continue to treat each other.
- 6. Focus on key points.**
- 7. Do not get distracted** by telephone calls, people walking by or other items.
- 8. Act poised and emotionally controlled.**



9. **Do not interrupt.**
10. **Do not change the subject** in the middle of the speaker's thoughts.
11. **Know when to “solve a problem” versus “let someone vent.”** A lot of people just want someone to listen to them. They want to get something off their chest. They want to say it aloud. The last thing they expect or want is to have someone offer solutions.
12. **Make the speaker like himself or herself better after talking with them.** One of the greatest benefits to keeping our mouths shut for a while is that whomever we're speaking with will start to like us. As humans, it is natural to like people who listen to us.

How Asking Questions Can Improve Your Listening

How does an individual or organization listen more effectively? One of the best methods I have found is by asking questions. On an individual level, we can talk with people, ask questions and learn their opinions.

- **On an organizational level, we can ask a lot of people the same questions—through survey research.** Asking a series of questions and systematically tracking the responses is one of the best ways to find out what a group (our target audience) is thinking.
- **A second approach is by listening to more than one channel (face-to-face meetings, e-mails, letters and others).** If you start to hear the same message again and again, more than likely, it is something you should pay attention to.
- **Third, we can listen more effectively by realizing what is NOT being said or what is left unsaid.** What someone chooses to talk about and not talk about speaks volumes about what's really going on. Focusing on what has been left unsaid forces a "reasonable conclusion" about what the speaker meant.
- **Finally, being polite enhances listening.** After completing a training session for a group of executives, one of them asked the question: "Is not effective listening really about being polite and respectful? This is the kind of stuff I would have heard my mother tell me." I thought about it for a moment and responded, "Yes. It is all about politeness. The problem is that, a lot of people have forgotten how to be polite to one another. It's good to remind ourselves of what we could and should be doing when talking with someone else."

Practicing to Become a Better Listener

In a typical day, everyone can be both a "good" and a "bad" listener, depending upon how that person is feeling physically and how distracted he or she is. To improve our listening, we must decide to be good listeners and practice the behaviors with dedication.

Here are a few suggestions you can try to improve your listening skills over the next couple of weeks:

- **Think about the best listener you know.** What do they do? How does their listening affect you? Which of their techniques can you put to work in your listening?
- **The next time you are in a meeting, force yourself to be quiet for awhile.** Concentrate on what is really being said and what is being left unsaid.
- **When someone is doing a good job of listening to you, give him or her some positive feedback.** He or she will appreciate it.
- **Ask people you trust to give you some suggestions on how to be a better listener—then try their suggestions for couple of weeks.** You might find your new listening habits are tremendously valuable in making your life easier, not to mention improving your relationships.