

«Effective Ways of Improving Listening Skills»

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Annotation: This article gives information about vital keys of listening skills and some methods that are proven.

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Communication is like throwing and catching a ball. You need to be alert to receive information through reading and listening in the same way you need to be alert to receive a pass on a football pitch. Both require focus and skill. If any communication to be complete and effective, of course the words you use (whether oral or written) need to be chosen carefully. But remember, communication is two-way – we have got to learn to be a good listener too! Without learning to be a good listener, you are unlikely to achieve understanding. Think about it. It is not just speaking that conveys meaning – how the other person listens also conveys meaning to the other person, and this helps to make the exchange successful ... or not! There is hardly any point in someone talking if no-one listens to what is being said. Listening is half of oral communication, and it is a skill that needs to be practised and taken equally as seriously as speaking and writing. Most effective leaders and managers realise the importance of acquiring good listening skills, so if you are aiming to climb the ladder of success, this is something you need to take seriously. The consequences of not listening carefully could be disastrous.

Good listening skills will give you an edge in life and at work. However, if you are to become an effective listener, it is going to take more than just desire and enthusiasm – it is going to take a huge conscious effort. Here are suggestions for how you can improve your listening skills:

Prepare to listen. Clear your mind so that your attention is assured.

Avoid pre-judgment. Do not pre-judge the speaker because of appearance or occupation, and do not jump to any conclusions before hearing what is said.

Be open-minded. Appreciate the speaker's point of view and accept that it may not necessarily agree with your own. Establish eye contact. This shows that you are listening, as does your posture and your facial expressions. **Do not interrupt.** Try to keep emotions out of it and hold any counter-arguments until the speaker has finished. Watch for signals. Pick up aspects that the speaker considers important by watching posture and gestures, as well as listening to intonation in the speaker's voice. This is like listening to the 'music' as well as to the words. Judge content, not delivery. Appraise the content instead of the speaker. Consider the main points and ask if they make sense.

Extract key points. Pick out and repeat to yourself some key words or phrases. This will help to fix in your mind what is being said.

Give feedback. Learn to give positive feedback non-verbally, perhaps by nodding or smiling, to let the speaker know you are following what is being said. Be alert and make an appropriate comment or ask a question if it will help your understanding. Block out distractions. Fight distractions and competing thoughts, by working hard at listening. You may need to close doors, turn off a television or radio, or move closer to the speaker. Many people assume that good listeners have an intrinsic talent and that it's something that can't be learned. But while it may come easier to some people, the reality is that listening skills can be developed with deliberate effort and practice. It could be that friend who looks at you with the glazed eyes of a goldfish while you're speaking and continuously cuts you off mid sentence.

Or the colleague at work who always says "Feel free to chat" but spends the whole time talking about their problems when you do finally grab a coffee.

These experiences are annoying as hell – because there’s nothing that gets people’s backs’ up quite like not being listened to. But the truth is that we’re often guilty of doing exactly the same things. In fact, many of us are equally bad listeners as these annoying people - we’re just not aware of it.

In fact, studies have shown that the average person can only remember 50% of what they’ve heard straight after they’ve heard it. Another study has shown that only 10% of the initial message communicated is retained after 3 days.

The reason for these shocking stats is that most of us think of listening as a passive process that requires no effort. But listening isn’t the same thing as hearing –it’s an active process and a skill that needs to be practiced and refined.

7 Keys of active Listening Skills

1. Be attentive.
2. Ask open-ended questions.
3. Ask probing questions.
4. Request clarification.
5. Paraphrase.
6. Be attuned to and reflect feelings.
7. Summarize.

And I’m not the only one saying this – the importance of listening has been emphasised since ancient times. The Greek philosopher Diogenes once said, “We have two ears and one tongue so to listen more and talk less” The way to improve your listening skills is to practice "active listening." This is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, the complete message being communicated. In order to do this you must pay attention to the other person very carefully.

You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by forming counter arguments while the other person is still speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to get bored, and lose focus on what the other person is saying. Active listening refers to a pattern of listening that keeps you engaged with your conversation partner in a positive way. It is the process of listening attentively while someone else speaks, paraphrasing and reflecting back what is said, and withholding judgment and advice. Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting her down. If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say them. This will reinforce their message and help you to stay focused.

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