



LISTENING SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

- **“The World is giving you answers each day. Learn to LISTEN.”**

DEFINATION

- Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives--from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport.
- Regardless of how we are engaged with listening, it is important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us.

“Listening is not the same as Hearing”

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and nonverbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.
- Listening skills are an important part of effective communication. Last week's feature focused on communication skills and their importance in the workplace. Hearing is the physical ability, while listening is a skill. Listening skills allow one to make sense of and understand what another person is saying.
- —Are you listening to me?|| This question is often asked because the speaker thinks the listener is nodding off or daydreaming. You may have heard the adage, —We have two ears but only one mouth||— an easy way to remember that listening can be twice as important as talking.
- The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

STAGES OF LISTENING

- The listening process involves five stages: *receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding*. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what has been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they have received.

1. RECEIVING

- This is the first and most basic stage of the listening process: the act of actually absorbing the information being expressed to you, whether verbally or nonverbally. Not all communication is done through speech, and not all listening is done with ears.
- Focus all of your energy on them, by following these three simple tips:
- **Avoid distractions.** This is obvious. Don't have your cell phone out, or your iPod in, or the television on. Don't try to divide your attention between the speaker and something else.
- **Don't interrupt the speaker.** You might want to make an assumption about what the speaker is saying, or what they're about to say – don't. It's rude, and you may find your assumption was wrong, which is beneficial to no one
- **Don't rehearse your response.** Not *yet*. At this stage, your job is only to listen. If you start to plan a speech while the other person is speaking, you're going to miss certain points and not be able to respond to their larger message when it's your turn to talk.

2. UNDERSTANDING

- This is the point in the listening process where you're able to plan your response. Understanding takes place after you've received the information from the speaker, and begin to process its meaning.
- You can do this by asking questions, or rephrasing parts of the speaker's message. This allows you to demonstrate your active engagement with their words, *and* help you better understand their key points.

3. REMEMBERING

- Remembering is about retaining that information, and the most effective way to do so in an important conversation is to move the key elements of a message from your short-term memory, and into your long-term memory.
- There are numerous methods for doing this
- Identify the fundamental points. By converting a collection of small details into a central theme, you're able to create something potentially complicated into an easy-to-grasp general concept. The details will remain in your short-term memory, but isolating the main ideas will help you understand them better, and remember them longer.
- **Make the message familiar.** If the speaker touches some old memories and past experiences, it becomes easy to retain the attention of the listener. Use those to help you retain incoming information as a listener.

4. EVALUATING

- It's at this stage where you can begin to prepare for your response, but remember: you're still a listener, not a speaker. After the message has been absorbed, processed, and remembered, you can begin to sort the information into pieces.
- What is fact, and what is opinion?
- What parts of their message were interpreted, and which parts were unbiased?
- What was the speaker's intent with their message?
- After interpreting the speaker's message, through a combination of understanding, retention, and evaluation, you're ready to form a response.

5. RESPONDING

- If you've completed the receiving, understanding, remembering, and evaluating portions of the listening process, responding should be easier than ever. It's important to understand the transition between listening and speaking though, and be aware of the ways responding is still a part of the active listening process.
- **Don't complete the speaker's sentences.** This is a presumptuous and rude way to segue into your own response. It impedes on the receiving process, and will make the original speaker want to listen to you less.
- **Address the speaker's points.** It will make it easier for the speaker to transition into a listener when they know exactly what part of their message you're addressing.

ESSENTIALS OF LISTENING SKILLS

- A conversation requires concentrated listening. Many people assume they know how to listen. However, these people may be mistaking just hearing for effective listening. Listening does require hearing, but it also requires interpretation and understanding – in other words, two-way communication.
- Listening effectively enables you to better understand and interpret what someone is saying. For example, you'll know what your manager needs from you only if you listen attentively. This can help you improve productivity and avoid mistakes.
- If you listen effectively, you're able to show your coworkers that you're interested in and have respect for what they have to say. You encourage them to do the same and so develop mutual respect, which fosters strong and smooth work relationships.
- The ability to listen effectively also means opening your mind to new experiences. You learn constantly and other people's thoughts, knowledge, or ideas will inspire your thinking and encourage you to be more innovative.