**How to overcome the barriers of listening?**

Follow these steps to reduce listening barriers at work:

1. Minimize distractions.
2. Prioritize listening over speaking.
3. Reduce outside noise.
4. Practice reflecting instead of deflecting.
5. Ask questions.
6. Listen fully before giving advice.

**1. Minimize distractions**

To avoid getting distracted, make sure you are physically facing the speaker and attempt to make frequent eye contact with them while they are speaking. Make sure you are seated or standing comfortably but appropriately so you can remain engaged. Put away your cell phone or any other pieces of technology that could become a distraction. The speaker may also appreciate the gesture you’ve made to show them that they have your undivided attention.

**2. Prioritize listening over speaking**

If you think you might be an excessive talker, try to practice self-control in conversation. Give the other person room to speak. During any conversation with a coworker, wait until they’re finished speaking before you respond to show respect for what they’re saying. Finally, observe your listeners’ reactions as you talk. If you notice signs of distraction in someone you are speaking with, consider asking questions to encourage them to talk more and direct their focus back on the conversation.

**3. Reduce outside noise**

Before having a conversation, minimize sound in your environment that could be distracting or make it more challenging to hear. A noisy environment can create distractions for both listeners and speakers, resulting in possible disruptions to conversations. To minimize noise, turn off mobile devices or place them on silent. Plan to hold important conversations in a place that you know will be quiet, like your office or a private meeting area. If someone is talking loudly outside your office or making other distracting noises, it is often better to politely ask them to move elsewhere or keep the noise down.

**4. Practice reflecting instead of deflecting**

To bond with your conversation partner or show them you’re engaged, you may feel eager to share your personal experiences when listening. However, a better approach typically involves merely listening and providing responses that focus on the other person’s situation. This shows that you’re genuinely invested in their side of the conversation.

To listen effectively, keep deflecting to a minimum and try reflecting instead. Reflecting involves paraphrasing back to the speaker what they have said. To do so, you could use language like, “*What I am hearing from you is...*” or “It sounds frustrating that that happened to you.” Reflecting could also involve asking a follow-up question based on what you have heard, such as “*What did you do after he said that?*” or “*How did that make you feel?*”

Reflecting assures your listener that you are paying close attention, but it can also help to correct any possible misunderstandings. Reflecting allows the other person to correct what you may have misheard.

**5. Ask questions**

In addition to reflecting, asking questions is an effective listening technique. Focus on asking questions based on what the speaker has already told you and are designed to elicit more information. The best questions are nonjudgmental and flow directly from something the speaker has recently said.

**6. Listen fully before giving advice**

It can sometimes be tempting to offer advice after someone shares a problem or concern with you, especially if you want to help them solve that problem. However, wait to advise unless the speaker specifically asks for it. Sometimes people share their concerns in the workplace simply to build bonds with colleagues or to make a coworker aware of a problem. Sharing issues can be a way to start introducing conversations deeper than small talk.

If you want to share advice, think first about whether your colleague is truly soliciting advice or just looking for a way to vent. Instead of advising, consider offering empathy with responses such as, “That sounds frustrating,” or try reflecting instead.

**Tips for effective listening**

Here are some additional tips to help you improve your listening skills at work:

**Look for opportunities to practice listening**

Because conversation is integral to everyday life in addition to the workplace, you should have plenty of opportunities to hone this soft skill. While you are conversing with someone, plan to use an effective listening response, such as asking questions.

### Reflect on your conversations

After a conversation, take some time to think about whether you were listening effectively and what kinds of barriers may have occurred. Then, you can think about how you might handle such obstacles in the future.

### Focus your conversations on the other person

To help prevent listening barriers before they arise, approach conversations with the mindset that you genuinely want to learn more about the other person while they talk. This can naturally help you get rid of distractions and focus only on the conversation you’re having.