

Effective Listening and Characteristics

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Abstract

Listening is receiving language through the ears. Listening involves identifying the sounds of speech and processing them into words and sentences. When we listen, we use our ears to receive individual sounds (letters, stress, rhythm and pauses) and we use our brain to convert these into messages that mean something to us. Listening in any language requires focus and attention. It is a skill that some people need to work at harder than others. People who have difficulty concentrating are typically poor listeners. Listening in a second language requires even greater focus. Like babies, we learn this skill by listening to people who already know how to speak the language. This may or may not include native speakers. For practice, you can listen to live or recorded voices. The most important thing is to listen to a variety of voices as often as you can to become a fluent speaker in English, you need to develop strong listening skills. Listening not only helps you understand what people are saying to you. It also helps you to speak clearly to other people. It helps you learn how to pronounce words properly, how to use intonation, and where to place stress in words and sentences.

This makes your speech easier for others in today's high-tech, high-speed, high-stress world, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another. Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. It helps build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts, and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers. It saves money and marriages.

Key Words : Dynamic process. Inhibits communication, Opportunisms, and Mentally screen.

Introduction

Listening is a significant part of communication process. Communication cannot take place until and unless a message is heard and retained thoroughly and positively by the receivers/listeners. Listening is a dynamic process. Listening means attentiveness and interest perceptible in the posture as well as expressions. Listening implies decoding (translating the symbols into meaning) and interpreting the messages correctly in communication process. Effective listening requires both deliberate efforts and a keen mind. Effective listeners appreciate flow of new ideas and information. Organizations that follow the principles of effective listening are always informed timely, updated with the changes and implementations, and are always out of crisis situation. Effective listening promotes organizational relationships, encourages product delivery and innovation, as well as helps organization to deal with the diversity in employees and customers it serves. To improve your

communication skills, you must learn to listen effectively. Effective listening gives you an advantage and makes you more impressive when you speak. It also boosts your performance

Listening Differs From Hearing

1. Hearing implies just perceiving the sounds while listening means listening with understanding whatever you are listening. Both the body as well as mind is involved in listening process.
2. Listening is an active process while hearing is a passive activity.
3. Hearing is an effortless activity while listening is an act requiring conscious efforts, concentration and interest. Listening involves both physical and psychological efforts.

Effective Skills for Listening.

1. Grasp and understand the matter/content.
2. Remain calm. Do not lose your temper. Anger hampers and inhibits communication. Angry people jam their minds to the words of others.
3. Be open to accept new ideas and information.
4. Jot down and take a note of important points.
5. Work upon listening. Analyze and evaluate the speech in spare time.
6. Rephrase and summarize the speaker's ideas.
7. Keep on asking questions. This demonstrates that how well you understand the speaker's ideas and also that you are listening.
8. Avoid distractions.
9. "Step into the shoes of others", i.e., put yourself in the position of the speaker and observe things from his view point. This will help creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding and improve the exchange of ideas in communication process.

Characteristics of Good Listener

Good and effective listener tries to give maximum amount of thought to the speaker's ideas being communicated, leaving a minimum amount of time for mental exercises to go off track. A good listener:

1. **Attentive-** Good listener must pay attention to the key points. He should be alert. He should avoid any kind of distraction.
2. **Assume-** Good listener does not ignore the information he considers is unnecessary. He should always summarize the speaker's ideas so that there is no misunderstanding of thoughts of speakers. He avoids premature judgments about the speaker's message.
3. **Listen for feelings and facts-** Good listener deliberately listens for the feelings of the speaker. He concentrates totally on the facts. He evaluates the facts objectively. His listening is sympathetic, active

and alert. He keenly observes the gestures, facial expression and body language of the speaker. In short, a good listener should be projective (i.e. one who tries to understand the views of the speaker) and empathic (i.e. one who concentrates not only on the surface meaning of the message but tries to probe the feelings and emotions of the speaker).

4. **Concentrate on the other speakers kindly and generously-** A good listener makes deliberate efforts to give a chance to other speakers also to express their thoughts and views. He tries to learn from every speaker. He evaluates the speaker's ideas in spare time. He focuses on the content of the speaker's message and not on the speaker's personality and looks.
5. **Opportunisms-** A good listener tries to take benefit from the opportunities arising. He asks "What's in it for me?"

To conclude, effective listening enhances the communication quality. It makes all attentive. It encourages optimistic attitude, healthy relations and more participation. It leads to better decision- making in an organization. Effective listening is directly related to our ability to do team work. It must be noted that "We listen at about an efficiency rate of 25 percent maximum, and we remember only about 50 percent of what is delivered during a ten minute speech/lecture/communication."

1. Expression the speaker and continue eye contact.

Talking to someone while they scan the room, study a computer screen, or gaze out the window is like trying to hit a moving target. How much of the person's divided attention you are actually getting? Fifty percent? Five percent? If the person were your child you might demand, "Look at me when I'm talking to you," but that's not the sort of thing we say to a lover, friend or colleague.

In most Western cultures, eye contact is considered a basic ingredient of effective communication. When we talk, we look each other in the eye. That doesn't mean that you can't carry on a conversation from across the room, or from another room, but if the conversation continues for any length of time, you (or the other person) will get up and move. The desire for better communication pulls you together.

Do your conversational partners the courtesy of turning to face them. Put aside papers, books, the phone and other distractions. Look at them, even if they don't look at you. Shyness, uncertainty, shame, guilt, or other emotions, along with cultural taboos, can inhibit eye contact in some people under some circumstances. Excuse the other guy, but stay focused yourself.

2. Be Helpful, But Tranquil.

Now that you've made eye contact, relax. You don't have to stare fixedly at the other person. You can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. The important thing is to be attentive. The dictionary says that to "attend" another person means to:

A) be present b) give attention c) direct yourself d) pay attention e) direct yourself

Mentally screen out distractions, like background activity and noise. In addition, try not to focus on the speaker's accent or speech mannerisms to the point where they become distractions. Finally, don't be distracted by your biases.

3 .Keep An Open Mind.

Listen without judging the other person or mentally criticizing the things she tells you. If what she says alarms you, go ahead and feel alarmed, but don't say to yourself, "Well, that was a stupid move." As soon as you indulge in judgmental bemusements, you've compromised your effectiveness as a listener. Listen without jumping to conclusions. Remember that the speaker is using language to represent the thoughts and feelings inside her brain. You don't know what those thoughts and feelings are and the only way you'll find out is by listening. Don't be a sentence-grabber. Occasionally my partner can't slow his mental pace enough to listen effectively, so he tries to speed up mine by interrupting and finishing my sentences. This usually lands him way off base, because he is following his own train of thought and doesn't learn where my thoughts are headed. After a couple of rounds of this, I usually ask, "Do you want to have this conversation by yourself, or do you want to hear what I have to say?" I wouldn't do that with everyone, but it works with him.

4. Listen And Try To Picture What The Narrator Is Saying.

Allow your mind to create a mental model of the information being communicated. Whether a literal picture, or an arrangement of abstract concepts, your brain will do the necessary work if you stay focused, with senses fully alert. When listening for long stretches, concentrate on, and remember, key words and phrases. When it's your turn to listen, don't spend the time planning what to say next. You can't rehearse and listen at the same time. Think only about what the other person is saying. Finally, concentrate on what is being said, even if it bores you. If your thoughts start to wander, immediately force yourself to refocus.

5. Don't Disrupt And Don't Enforce Your Solution.

Children used to be taught that it's rude to interrupt. I'm not sure that message is getting across anymore. Certainly the opposite is being modeled on the majority of talk shows and reality programs, where loud, aggressive, in-your-face behavior is condoned, if not encouraged. We all think and speak at different rates. If you are a quick thinker and an agile talker, the burden is on you to relax your pace for the slower, more thoughtful communicator—or for the guy who has trouble expressing himself. When listening to someone talk about a problem, refrain from suggesting solutions. Most of us don't want your advice anyway. If we do, we'll ask for it. Most of us prefer to figure out our own solutions. We need you to listen and help us do that. Somewhere way down the line, if you are absolutely bursting with a brilliant solution, at least get the speaker's permission. Ask, "Would you like to hear my ideas?"

6. Pause and Ask for Clarifying Questions.

When you don't understand something, of course you should ask the speaker to explain it to you. But rather than interrupt, wait until the speaker pauses. Then say something like, "Back up a second. I didn't understand what you just said about..."

7. Ask questions

At lunch, a colleague is excitedly telling you about her trip to Vermont and all the wonderful things she did and saw. In the course of this chronicle, she mentions that she spent some time with a mutual friend. You jump in with, "Oh, I haven't heard from Alice in ages. How is she?" and, just like that, discussion shifts to Alice and her divorce, and the poor kids, which leads to a comparison of custody laws, and before you know it an hour is gone and Vermont is a distant memory. This particular conversational affront happens all the time. Our questions lead people in directions that have nothing to do with where *they* thought they were going. Sometimes we work our way back to the original topic, but very often we don't. When you notice that your question has led the speaker astray, take responsibility for getting the conversation back on track by saying something like, "It was great to hear about Alice, but tell me more about your adventure in Vermont."

8 . The Narrator Emotion.

If you feel sad when the person with whom you are talking expresses sadness, joyful when she expresses joy, fearful when she describes her fears—and convey those feelings through your facial expressions and words—then your effectiveness as a listener is assured. Empathy is the heart and soul of good listening. To experience empathy, you have to put yourself in the other person's place and allow yourself to feel what it is like to *be her* at that moment. This is not an easy thing to do. It takes energy and concentration. But it is a generous and helpful thing to do, and it facilitates communication like nothing else does.

9. Presenter Response.

Show that you understand where the speaker is coming from by reflecting the speaker's feelings. "You must be thrilled!" "What a terrible ordeal for you." "I can see that you are confused." If the speaker's feelings are hidden or unclear, then occasionally paraphrase the content of the message. Or just nod and show your understanding through appropriate facial expressions and an occasional well-timed "hmmm" or "uh huh." The idea is to give the speaker some proof that you are listening, and that you are following her train of thought—not off indulging in your own fantasies while she talks to the ether. In task situations, regardless of whether at work or home, always restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly.

10. Attention To What *Isn't* Said

If you exclude email, the majority of direct communication is probably nonverbal. We glean a great deal of information about each other without saying a word. Even over the telephone, you can learn almost as much about a person from the tone and cadence of her voice than from anything she says. When I talk to my best friend,

it doesn't matter what we chat about, if I hear a lilt and laughter in her voice, I feel reassured that she's doing well. Face to face with a person, you can detect enthusiasm, boredom, or irritation very quickly in the expression around the eyes, the set of the mouth, the slope of the shoulders. These are clues you can't ignore. When listening, remember that words convey only a fraction of the message.

Listening Skills Exercise

For at least one week, at the end of every conversation in which information is exchanged, conclude with a summary statement. In conversations that result in agreements about future obligations or activities, summarizing will not only ensure accurate follow-through, it will feel perfectly natural. In conversations that do not include agreements, if summarizing feels awkward just explain that you are doing it as an exercise.

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