

Poor Listening Habits

Listening well requires clear thinking, patience, high motivation and hard work. To listen well, people need to be open-minded and receptive to improvement. Often we do not want to improve. That is, we smugly assume that our communication efforts are better than those of other people. And those other people, not us, are the ones who cause all the communication problems. We are much less effective in listening than we think we are.

As with other skills, our listening habits are one that have been developed and reinforced through the years. Some habits can actually affect our ability to listen effectively. These habits are:

(1) Avoiding Challenging or Difficult Listening Situations: There are times when we can enjoy and actually need to engage in easy listening situations to replenish our listening energy tanks. But if we find ourselves routinely avoiding challenging listening situations, it may be time for a change.

(2) Tolerating Distractions that can be controlled: Taking the initiative to control distractions can help save listening energy and make relationship more pleasant and rewarding.

(3) Taking Attention: Make a commitment to concentrate listening energy on the speaker in important settings in order to overcome the habits of faking attention.

(4) Criticizing a Speaker's Speaking Style or Personal Mannerisms: Focusing on the important elements in the communication setting rather than on the speaker's mannerisms is a much more profitable expenditure of listening energy.

(5) Concentrating Only on Easy-to-remember Facts and Missing the Bottom Line: Unless we listen with an intent to understand the essence of the message, we may be getting into the habit of picking and choosing only selected tidbits to process and remember. When we put these bits together at the end of the presentation or conversation, we may find that we have a totally incorrect perception of what the speaker was trying to get across.

(6) Wasting the Thinking-speaking Time Differential: Most speakers in conversation use 125 to 145 words per minute, we can listen at a much faster rate than others can speak. When a person speaks too slowly, we may get in the habit of day dreaming or doodling rather than using the time to internally anticipate, summarize, evaluate and review what we have heard. In these cases, we run the risk of missing valuable information.

Overcome Poor Listening Habits

Listening is a skill that requires practice. Becoming an effective listener requires changing attitudes toward speakers, attitudes toward topics, and personal habits that result in poor listening. Some strategies for becoming a better listener are shown in Figure 3-4.

Listening in Specific Situations

In the business world, you will find two common listening situations—listening in a small group and listening in a conference setting.

Key Point

Becoming an effective listener requires changing attitudes and habits that result in poor listening.

Figure 3-4 Practice listening skills to become a better listener.

LISTENING STRATEGIES

- Find common interests with the speaker or topic.
- Judge the content—not the delivery—of the message.
- Delay judgment until the speaker is finished.
- Listen for the main ideas of the message.
- Take notes on the important points.
- Concentrate on listening; stay alert.
- Avoid or ignore physical and environmental distractions.
- Listen with an open mind. Do not let prejudices or assumptions cause you to miss the message.
- Ask questions or give feedback, if appropriate.
- Review and evaluate or analyze the message after the speaker is finished.

Listening in a Small Group

When in a small group, all of your communication skills, including your listening skills, are important. Practice active listening. Listen for both ideas and feelings. Use effective eye contact and body language that indicate to others that you are listening. Check your understanding by asking questions or restating ideas as appropriate.

Listening in a Conference Setting

As an employee, you will continue to learn new skills and information related to your job. You may attend meetings, seminars, or conferences designed to improve your skills and knowledge. In such a setting, you will need to listen effectively in order to learn. Follow these guidelines for taking part in a seminar or conference.

- Clearly understand your reasons for being at the conference. What do you need to learn or accomplish at the conference?
- Choose comfortable seating.
- Choose seating where you can see the speaker and any visual aid that may be used.
- Avoid judging the speaker's subject, ability to present, and appearance before hearing the message.
- Take notes effectively.
- Ask questions when permitted.
- Review the content of your notes and add more details after the session.



Diversity

Be aware of cultural differences when communicating in a small group. Appropriate eye contact and desired personal space may vary by culture.