

Active listening



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Active Listening Hear What People are Really Saying Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others. * We listen to obtain information. * We listen to understand. * We listen for enjoyment. * We listen to learn. Given all this listening we do, you would think we'd be good at it! In fact most of us are not, and research suggests that we remember between 25 percent and 50 percent of what we hear.

That means that when you talk to your boss, colleagues, customers or spouse for 10 minutes, they pay attention to less than half of the conversation. This is dismal! Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren't hearing the whole message either. You hope the important parts are captured in your 25-50 percent, but what if they're not? Clearly, listening is a skill that we can all benefit from improving. By becoming a better listener, you will improve your productivity, as well as your ability to influence, persuade and negotiate.

What's more, you'll avoid conflict and misunderstandings. All of these are necessary for workplace success! Good communications skills require a high level of self-awareness. By understanding your personal style of communicating, you will go a long way towards creating good and lasting impressions with others. About Active Listening The way to become a better listener 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, try to understand the complete message being sent.

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 that you'll make when the other person stops speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to get bored, and lose focus on what the other person is saying. All of these contribute to a lack of listening and understanding. 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 stay focused.

To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what he or she is saying. To understand the importance of this, ask yourself if you've ever been engaged in a conversation when you wondered if the other person was listening to what you were saying. You wonder if your message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak. It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid. Acknowledgement can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh". You aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening also reminds you to pay attention and not let your mind wander. You should also try to respond to the speaker in a way that will both encourage him or her to continue speaking, so that you can get the information if you need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said communicates that you understand the message as well.

Becoming an Active Listener There are five key elements of active listening. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay Attention Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
 - * Look at the speaker directly.
 - * Put aside distracting thoughts.
 - * Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
 - * Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations." Listen" to the speaker's body language.
2. Show That You're Listening Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
 - * Nod occasionally.
 - * Smile and use other facial expressions.
 - * Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
 - * Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.
3. Provide Feedback Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said.

This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- * Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
- * Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say. " "Is this what you mean? "
- * Summarize the speaker's comments periodically. If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally.

What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant? "

4. Defer Judgment Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits

full understanding of the message. * Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions. * Don't interrupt with counter arguments. 5. Respond Appropriately Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down. * Be candid, open, and honest in your response. Assert your opinions respectfully. Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated. Listening is the ability to accurately receive messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Listening is so important that many top employers give regular listening skills training for their employees.

This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to: better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work. Good listening skills also have benefits in our personal lives, including: a greater number of friends and social networks, improved self-esteem and confidence, higher grades in academic work and increased health and wellbeing. Studies have shown that, whereas speaking raises blood pressure, listening brings it down.

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 non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages. “ The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen.

Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. ” Rachel Naomi Remen We spend a lot of our time listening Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication, of this an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, R. et al. 2001). 10 Principles of Listening A good listener will listen not only to what is being said, but also to what is left unsaid or only partially said. Listening involves observing body language and noticing inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages.

For example, if someone tells you that they are happy with their life but through gritted teeth or with tears filling their eyes, you should consider that the verbal and non-verbal messages are in conflict, they maybe don't mean what they say. Listening requires you to concentrate and use your other senses in addition to simply hearing the words spoken. Listening is not the same as hearing and in order to listen effectively you need to use more than just your ears. 1. Stop Talking “ If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear. ” Mark Twain. Don't talk, listen.

When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen. When the other person has finished talking you may need to clarify to ensure you have received their message accurately. 2. Prepare Yourself to Listen

Relax. Focus on the speaker. Put other things out of mind. The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts - what's for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain - try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated. 3.

Put the Speaker at Ease Help the speaker to feel free to speak. Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue. Maintain eye contact but don't stare - show you are listening and understanding what is being said. 4. Remove Distractions Focus on what is being said: don't doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. These behaviours disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted. 5. Empathize Try to understand the other person's point of view.

Look at issues from their perspective. Let go of preconceived ideas. By having an open mind we can more fully empathise with the speaker. If the speaker says something that you disagree with then wait and construct an argument to counter what is said but keep an open mind to the views and opinions of others. (See our page: What is Empathy?) 6. Be Patient A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished. Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it.

Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone. 7. Avoid Personal Prejudice Try to be impartial. Don't become irritated and don't let the person's habits or mannerisms distract you from what they are really saying. Everybody has a different way of speaking - some people are for example more nervous or

shy than others, some have regional accents or make excessive arm movements, some people like to pace whilst talking - others like to sit still. Focus on what is being said and try to ignore styles of delivery. 8. Listen to the Tone

Volume and tone both add to what someone is saying. A good speaker will use both volume and tone to their advantage to keep an audience attentive; everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations - let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said. 9. Listen for Ideas - Not Just Words You need to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces. Maybe one of the most difficult aspects of listening is the ability to link together pieces of information to reveal the ideas of others.

With proper concentration, letting go of distractions, and focus this becomes easier. 10. Wait and Watch for Non-Verbal Communication Gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements can all be important. We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes - watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication. Do not jump to conclusions about what you see and hear. You should always seek clarification to ensure that your understanding is correct.