

Listening

The Process of Listening

Listening is not a process of transferring an idea from the mind of a speaker to the mind of a listener. Rather it is a process of speaker and listener working together to achieve a common understanding. The listening process is a circular one. The responses of Person A serve as the stimuli for Person B, whose responses in turn serve as the stimuli for Person A, and so on.

i. Receiving:

Listening begins with receiving messages the speaker sends. Here you receive both the verbal and the nonverbal messages. You should maintain your role as listener and avoid interrupting the speaker until he or she is finished.

ii. Understanding:

The understanding must take into consideration both the thoughts that are expressed as well as the emotional tone that accompanies these thoughts. For improved understanding, you should see the speaker's messages from the speaker's point of view; avoid judging the message until you have fully understood it – as the speaker intended it.

iii. Remembering:

Messages that you receive and understand need to be retained for at least some period of time. You should identify the central ideas in a message and the major support advanced for them.

iv. Evaluating:

Evaluating consists of judging the messages in some way. Often this evaluation process goes on without much conscious thought. You should identify any biases, self-interests, or prejudices that may lead the speaker to slant unfairly what is presented.

v. Responding:

Responding occurs in two phases: (1) responses you make while the speaker is talking and (2) responses you make after the speaker has stopped talking. In responding try to be supportive of the speaker throughout the speaker's talk by using and varying backchanneling cues (I see, yes, uh-huh) and express support for the speaker in your final responses.

Types of Listening

The principles you follow in listening effectively should vary from one situation to another.

i. Participatory and Passive Listening:

As a listener, participate in the communication interaction as an equal partner with the speaker, as one who is emotionally and intellectually ready to engage in the mutual sharing of meaning.

Passive listening allows the speaker to develop his or her thoughts and ideas in the presence of another person who accepts but does not evaluate, who supports but does not intrude. By listening passively you provide a receptive and supportive environment.

ii. Empathic and Objective Listening:

If you want to understand what a person means and what a person is feeling, you need to listen with some degree of empathy. Empathic listening is a means for both increasing understanding and for relationship enhancement.

There are times when you need to go beyond empathic listening to measure the meanings and feelings against some objective reality. You should strive especially to be objective when listening to friends or foes. Your attitudes may lead you to distort messages – to block out positive messages about a foe and negative messages about a friend.

iii. Nonjudgmental and Critical listening:

Effective listening includes both nonjudgmental and critical responses. You need to listen nonjudgmentally, with an open mind with a view toward understanding. You should first listen for understanding and suspend judgment. You need to listen fairly, despite an out-of-place expression or a hostile remark.

If meaningful communication is to take place, you need to supplement open-minded listening with critical listening. Listening with a critical mind will help you analyze and evaluate the messages.

iv. Surface and Depth Listening:

In most messages there is an obvious meaning that we can derive from a literal reading of the words and sentences. But there is often another level of meaning. Most messages function on two or three levels at the same time.

Do not disregard the literal meaning of interpersonal messages in trying to uncover the more hidden meanings. Balance your listening between surface and the underlying meanings.

Task # 4

What would be an appropriate active listening response for each of these situations?

- i. A young nephew tells you that he can't talk with his parents. No matter how hard he tries, they just don't listen. "I tried to tell them that I can't play football and I don't want to play it," he confides. "But they ignore me and tell me that all I need is practice."
- ii. Your father has been having a difficult time at work. He was recently passed up for a promotion and received one of the lowest merit raises given in the company. "I am not sure what I did wrong," he tells you. "I do my work, mind my own business; don't take my sick days like everyone else. How could they give that promotion to Aslam who is only being with the company for two years? May be I should just quit."

What type(s) of listening you would use in each of the following situations? What type of listening would be obviously inappropriate in each situation?

- i. Your history instructor is giving a lecture on the contribution of the Ancient Greeks to modern civilization.
- ii. Your five year old sister says she wants to become a nurse.
- iii. A salesperson tells you of the benefits of a new computer.
- iv. A gossip columnist details the secret lives of stars.
- v. The television advertiser explains the benefits of a new City.