

Chapter 5: Listening is understanding

1. What is the core purpose of the chapter you are assigned to read?

In this chapter Greever moves on from explaining to the reader how to understand and make sense of a client's explanation of their problem or proposal and explains how you would go about listening to someone speak about their side. He explains that the act of listening is vital to a project's success as understanding a stakeholder's position before responding can help prevent confusion and ensure that the actions that you carry out are in line with what the stakeholder was explaining.

He goes over implicit skills such as: listening without interrupting; hearing what they're not saying; uncovering the actual problem they're trying to solve; and pausing before moving on. Each of these are vital as they help you further understand what the stakeholder is saying while creating a comfortable environment where the stakeholder feels that they are able to speak freely and un-restricted allowing them to give you as much information as possible. These implicit skills are vital to the requirement collection phase of a project as they give you the most and best information that is relevant to your project without confusion and allow you to stay on your stakeholder's good side, which is always a good idea.

He moves on to discuss explicit techniques such as: taking notes; asking questions and repeating or rephrasing what was said. These explicit techniques are important when talking with stakeholders to make sure that you collect the best information possible to present to your developers and designers. Stakeholders won't necessarily know how to explain something in terms of design "jargon", or don't always know exactly what they're looking for, so it's important to frequently ask questions regarding what they said to guarantee that you're recording details about design that are what the stakeholders are describing but in design "jargon". Furthermore, it's always important to rephrase what the stakeholder has said when they speak to you, this way the stakeholder has an understanding of how you are representing their words and it ensures that they agree with what you are writing down.

2. What were 3 things you found curious/interesting/compelling/annoying/contradictory and why?

- a. Greever explains in the section "The art of the pause" how important it is to place the right pauses in your sentences to allow the discussion to flow both naturally as well as allowing the stakeholder to interject with their thoughts freely. If the stakeholder were to say something and then you were to go off on a huge tangent with run on sentences and the like then the stakeholder won't be able to give their input on what your saying, their input is crucial because as you are explaining/rephrasing things to them they need to be able to have a chance to interject with their thoughts. See? If you were to talk like that, then there would be no point where the stakeholder has a time that they could speak their mind.

He also stresses the importance of leaving a pause after the stakeholder has spoken for 3 main reasons. The first is that you want to make sure that they're done saying what they're saying, simple enough. It then gives space for the thought being said to settle in each of your mind and really absorb what is being said. The final point he makes is that it communicates to the stakeholder that you are considering and actually processing what they are thinking. This is crucial for a discussion where a stakeholder is explaining something as it creates a comfortable atmosphere that is suitable for you to find the most effective response.

- b. I found it interesting when Greever explained his methods for taking notes, and then compared it to how I take notes, which are methods that I developed myself by just repeating processes that lead to better results in courses.

He starts by explaining the importance of writing it all down, like everything. If you're talking to a stakeholder for extended periods of time then there's a good chance that you won't remember everything that the stakeholder is saying and important information could be lost simply because you didn't write down something that they mentioned. In my experience this is something that I do employ, when sitting in a lecture my goal is not to write down what is on the lecture slides, that's a waste of time. The goal of me writing notes is to write down every point that the professor makes and then reference where that appears in the slides. You can then further break down these notes and then when you get a chance take a look and paraphrase what the professor (stakeholder) has said and re-write it in your own words underneath which leads to the next point being made.

Greever mentions the importance of keeping notes organized

- What does this mean?
 - o It means that you need to organize your notes in a consistent way that makes sense to you
 - o If your notes make sense to you then this allows you to better explain the topics being discussed in the future to designers or stakeholders
 - Also makes it easier to sift through your notes and look for key concepts and depending on how you take your notes, the bits and pieces that are follow up
- It avoids repeat conversations by neatly organizing your notes you give yourself the chance to break down the conversation into key points
 - o If you notice that a key point is being talked about again you can go back up to that tab and record more information underneath that header
 - Also gives you time to paraphrase
 - A chance to ask follow up questions
 - o Also allows you to move the conversation forward if you feel the topic has been discussed enough

It's always important to follow up on your notes afterwards to correct mistakes or make things clearer for yourself so that in future meetings with stakeholders you can reference your notes and pick up where you left off. This gives your stakeholder the confidence that they feel you're actually listening to them and allows you the chance to clarify any details you may have missed.

He has a follow-up sections called "Taking Better Notes" but all the points made in it are fairly self explanatory, "Accessible, Organized, Specific, Definitive, Actionable, Referenced, and Forward-looking," but what I found most interesting was that these are already techniques that I apply to my note taking.

- c. His next section in this chapter focuses on asking questions, and rephrasing what a stakeholder has said to clarify any outstanding points. Having worked in internship positions before and experiencing first hand how stakeholders communicate, I found this section to be quite familiar as well.

In my internship last summer, I was working remotely so I was largely unsupervised during my work. This made it vital for me to have clear communication with my CTO and head engineer to get as much information out of them about what I should be working on in as little time as possible (they weren't very good at managing me). It was pretty important for me to take charge as I was the one who scheduled meetings, prepared talking points, and ultimately presented my thoughts during the meetings. What would I present? I would mostly be asking questions about my current task and then when I got an answer, rephrasing their answer to them to ensure that I was understanding them correctly.

He goes over some common questions which were all familiar questions that I had asked before, and then goes in depth as to why these are useful questions. Which was kind of neat because I hadn't really thought about why I was asking the questions, I was more just asking the questions to get what I wanted.

When he continues to talk about rephrasing the stakeholder's statements Greever mentions that it is important to rephrase them because they won't know the "right words". What he means by this is that if you listen to them talk about a certain system in your app you should, for example, clarify that they are talking about the same thing as you by referencing it in your own design "jargon" and then see if that is the system that they are indeed talking about. I found this interesting because I was working with a huge ecosystem of interconnected projects that basically all had custom libraries, and names that I had come up with. If my CTO were to mention something about the export database, I would follow up and ask him if he was talking about my LF3 schema and the ToAlex class in my Socket_Control project. Of course this is lots of jargon that my CTO would have no way of memorizing or knowing, so it was interesting to read about how Greever says someone should rephrase statements and comparing it to how I would rephrase statements.

3. Design an exam question which will highlight the critical distinction of this chapter.

Of the three main topics being discussed in this chapter: "Let them talk," "Take better notes," and "Ask and rephrase," which do you think is the most important lesson to employ when talking to a stakeholder. Compare the importance of each topic and explain why you think the topic that you chose as the best is the most important.

4. When could you have really used Greever's wisdom? Explain your unique situation.

When I was working my internship this Summer, I had many conference calls which I scheduled with my CTO and head engineer of the software company that I was working at. These conference calls were my only 10 minutes of communication with them per week, and if I had known how to ask questions better and ask about key topics in a way that was more clear to my employer this would have greatly helped me gather requirements for what I should be working on, and what the employer expected out of my project.

At the end of the summer I was apparently supposed to have some sort of presentation prepared but this was never communicated to me, if I had had the foresight to bring this up at the beginning of my internship and to collect all of the requirements for the project, that would have been very helpful in giving me an understanding of what I was expected to deliver at the end.

Another result of my lack of experience was that my deliverable wasn't very.... Deliverable... I ended up just giving them everything that was in my repository with no explanation, documentation, or diagrams to speak of. This may have been the fault of them for not specifying exactly what they were expecting but if I had learned the better communication skills I would have known to ask more about what they were expecting and to rephrase what they were specifying into my own words so that my design would have fit their vision better.

5. In what ways will you use Greever's wisdom going forward? Explain your unique emphasis and implementation.

Not to repeat myself too much but going forward I think it will be vital for me to improve my communication skills and learn to ask better questions. It's vital as a software engineer, or for me: a data scientist, to be able to easily articulate my ideas but it is even more important to be able to have confident conversations that let the stakeholder make their points with as much clarity as possible. The information gathering stage of a project is one of the most important phases during its lifecycle and failing to collect a little bit of important information because I didn't listen, take notes, rephrase, or because I intimidated my stakeholder is a failure to properly represent myself and my skills in a company. So by better improving listening and understanding skills I will help further my career and open up more opportunities through better networking with the knowledge gained from this chapter.