

Chapter 05 Listening

SUMMARY

More attention is usually paid to making people better speakers or writers (the "supply side" of the communication chain) rather than on making them better listeners or readers (the "demand side"). The most direct way to improve communication is by learning to listen more effectively. To be a great speaker, you need to be a great listener. For your message to reach the ears of those you speak to, you need to know what they want to hear. Everyone has a job to be done. You can only find out what that is by listening to what your audience is saying prior to preparing your speech. Listening is defined as applying oneself to hearing something. Of all kinds of skills of communication, listening is the most important of all. g. In verbal communication it is to hear while giving attention to what is being said.

The *sense of hearing* is being employed to take in the message. Our minds have the ability to listen four times faster than a person can talk. One challenge to effective listening would be focusing our minds on hearing what is said rather than the several other things going on in our lives at any given moment. *Understanding* means processing and interpreting of the message. Rather than thinking what you are going to say next, try to think of what is being said from the standpoint of the communicator. Think of yourself as their advocate and your purpose is to help everyone understand what the speaker is trying to communicate. If the listener fails to interpret correctly the words heard, the message is misunderstood. *Evaluation* requires appraising the message. First sort and classify what you are hearing. What are the implications, the applications, benefit or damage of the information? Response is acting on the message. This *response* allows speaker to know whether the message was correctly delivered and communication was successful.

To be good listener, you have to *hear*. Hearing is a quantitatively faster sense. If you are attentive and hear, you successfully listen. Stay away from *distractions*. Stop Talking! You cannot multi-task speaking and listening. Wait before you respond. Do not be in hurry to form your opinion. Allow for a thoughtful pause between reacting, a space in which to ask yourself, "Do I have the whole story?" Concentrate; when someone is speaking, stay focused. If you are attentive, you will show signs of focus – such as making eye contact – without thinking about it at all. To show you are listening, maintain *eye contact*. Give non-verbal clues. Nod, lean toward the speaker, take on the general demeanor of someone who is interested.

Do not be a *verbal trespasser*. A verbal trespasser is one who interrupts or finishes the speaker's sentences. Allow speaker to complete in his / her own words. Remember you need your eyes as well as ears to listen. Nonverbal message can only be seen, and not heard. A spoken message does not come only through words. And nonverbal message

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can occupy as much as 90% of the contents in a message. In order to get the message from the speaker, you have to pay attention to body language which carries 55% of the meaning and the tone of voice which carries 35% of the meaning. The speaker's body language and voice can tell about speaker's state of mind and feelings. Observe. Listen. Ask. Ask open questions. *Open questions* encourage the speaker. They elicit a more detailed response than closed questions. Also summarize what you understood and check with the speaker.

How will you ensure *others are listening* to you? Choose the *right time*. As the cliché states, there is a time and a place for everything, and communicating is no different. Avoid leaving discussions about heavy topics such as finances or weekly planning until late evening. Choose the *right place*. If you need to tell someone something that is not going to be well received (such as news of loss of a customer or delay in promotion), do not say it in public, around colleagues or near other people. *Remove distractions*. Turn off ALL electronics that could go off during the conversation. You can request the participants to switch off their mobile phones or keep them on silent (not vibration – as it will distract the particular listener) mode. *Organize and clarify* ideas in your mind. This should be done before you attempt to communicate these ideas. If you are feeling passionate about a topic, you may become garbled if you have not already thought of some key points to stick to when communicating it. Make it clear what you are wishing to convey from the outset. People need to know in advance what you expect from your communication. Stay on topic. Once you start addressing your three main points, make sure everything you are saying adds to the conversation or debate. Make use of time. Every now and then take a breather. Lastly thank the person or group for the time taken to listen and respond.

Barriers to effective listening:-*Knowing the answer*. "Knowing the answer" means that you think you already know what the speaker wants to say, before she actually finishes saying it. You might then impatiently cut her off or try to complete the sentence for her. A simple strategy for overcoming the "knowing the answer" barrier is to wait for three seconds after the speaker finishes before beginning your reply.

Another significant barrier to good listening is "*trying to be helpful*". Although trying to be helpful may seem beneficial, it interferes with listening because the listener is thinking about how to solve what he perceives to be the speaker's problem. Consequently, he misses what the speaker is actually saying. Avoid this by scheduling a separate session for giving advice. Many people forget that it is rude to offer advice when the speaker is not asking for it. This applies even if the advice is good.

Third barrier is treating discussion as *competition*. Some people feel that agreeing with the speaker during a heated discussion is a sign of weakness. They feel compelled to

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challenge every point the speaker makes, even if they inwardly agree. Remove the barrier. Although competitive debate serves many useful purposes, and can be great fun, debating should be scheduled for a separate session of its own, where it will not interfere with good listening.

Listening is hampered when people try to *influence or impress*. Because good listening depends on listening just for the sake of listening, any ulterior motive will diminish the effectiveness of the listener. "Trying to influence or impress" is a difficult barrier to overcome, because motives usually cannot just be willed away. Deciding not to have a motive usually only drives it beneath your awareness so that it becomes a hidden motive. One strategy is to make note of your internal motives while you're listening.

Red flag words can provoke a reaction in the listener that was not necessarily what the speaker intended. Therefore, when a speaker uses a word or expression that triggers a reflexive association, you as a good listener can ask the speaker to confirm whether she meant to say what you think she said.

One of the trickiest barriers is "*believing in language*" -- a misplaced trust in the precision of words. Language is a guessing game. You as a good listener ought to practice mistrusting the meaning of words. Ask the speaker supporting questions to cross-verify what the words mean to him.

A common saying refers to an inability "*to see the forest for the trees*". Sometimes people pay such close attention to detail, that they miss the overall meaning or context of a situation. You as a good listener can explicitly ask the speaker for overall context or for specific exemplary details, as needed. You should cross-verify by asking the speaker how the trees fit together to form the forest.

Good listening is arguably one of the most important skills to have in today's complex world. Families need good listening to face complicated stresses together. Corporate employees need it to solve complex problems quickly and stay competitive. Students need it to understand complex issues in their fields. Much can be gained by improving listening skills. When the question of how to improve communication comes up, most attention is paid to making people better speakers or writers (the "supply side" of the communication chain) rather than on making them better listeners or readers (the "demand side").

More depends on listening than on speaking. An especially skillful listener will know how to overcome many of the deficiencies of a vague or disorganized speaker. On the other hand, it won't matter how eloquent or cogent a speaker is if the listener isn't paying attention. The listener arguably bears more responsibility than the speaker for the quality of communication.