

HOW TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

1. Show interest in the other person and what he/she is saying.
2. Concentrate on what the speaker says.
3. Listen to more than the words.
4. Put aside personal views and opinions.
5. Listen to key words and phrases.
6. Check out your interpretations with the speaker. Don't assume!
7. Remember that listening is faster than talking.
8. Build the conversation on what the person has already said.
9. Use open-ended questions.
10. Remember that the speaker is not you!
11. Avoid negative, insensitive responses.

Active Listening Techniques

(handout)

Statements that help the other person talk.

STATEMENT	PURPOSE	TO DO THIS . . .	EXAMPLES
Encouraging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To convey interest To encourage the other person to keep talking 	...don't agree or disagree ...use neutral words ...use varying voice intonations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Can you tell me more...?"
Clarifying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To help you clarify what is said To get more information To help the speaker see other points of view 	...ask questions ...restate wrong interpretation to force the speaker to explain further	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> "When did this happen?"
Restating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To show you are listening and understanding what is being said To check your meaning and interpretation 	...restate basic ideas and facts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> "So you would like your parents to trust you more, is that right?"
Reflecting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To show that you understand how the person feels To help the person evaluate his or her own feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else 	...reflect the speaker's basic feelings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> "You seem very upset."
Summarizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To review progress To pull together important ideas and facts To establish a basis for further discussion 	...restate major ideas expressed including feelings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> "These seem to be the key ideas you've expressed..."
Validating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To acknowledge the worthiness of the other person 	...acknowledge the value of their issues and feelings ...show appreciation for their efforts and actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> "I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter"

LISTENING-EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Am I reading the client's nonverbal behaviors and seeing how they modify what he or she is saying verbally?
2. Am I careful not to over interpret this or that facial expression or gesture?
3. Am I listening carefully to the clients point of view, even when I sense that this point of view needs to be challenged?
4. Am I aware of my biases and how they affect my ability to listen?
5. Do I listen to what is going on inside myself as I interact with the client?
6. What distracts me from listening more carefully and what can I do to manage these distractions?

The fine art of listening

By John R. Ward

“Great ideas come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear amid the uproar of empires and nations a faint flutter of wings, the gentle string of life and hope.”

The words of Albert Camus are as appropriate today as when they were first spoken. Listening is mostly an underdeveloped skill, one of the greatest gifts you can give to yourself for your future success and personal well-being.

Studies tell us that 70 to 80 percent of our waking life is spent communicating on some level. Of that time, 45 percent is listening, 30 percent speaking, 16 percent reading and 9 percent writing. If almost half our time is spent listening, and since most people listen at the 25 percent level, imagine what you are missing. The good side of the equation is that listening is a skill that can be learned and improved. Like a musical instrument or sports, it takes practice and dedication. Unlike music or sports, results can be experienced quickly. Even a small effort will bring remarkable results.

How do you listen? With your ears? Your eyes? Your touch? Or do you listen while planning a vacation, worrying about bills or maneuvering for a new job? Do you fake attention, allow distractions, daydream or jump to conclusions and tune out? Good listeners are the exception in spite of the fact that no other skill can serve you better.

To make your communication work, you must “think” communication. As you listen, keep the thought in mind that there is something valuable you are about to learn, a small nugget of information: knowledge or wisdom is about to be revealed. If you sense nothing is happening, start asking questions.

Be an information gatherer. It’s the open door to discovery.

Author Rudyard Kipling explained the skill of questioning in these words: “I have six servants. They’ve taught me all I know. Their names are Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.” If you give your attention to these servants, you will realize they have different roles. When your interest leans toward the factual, you will use Who, Where

Let your eyes support your ears if only for the reason that you won’t learn if you don’t listen.

Good listening begins with the right attitude—cheerful, open, accepting. Then, put yourself in the process by “thinking” communication. Your self-training program can get into high gear by choosing one of the activities listed in the box below to concentrate on for one week. Let them all become habits.

- **Listen for ideas, concepts.**
- **Paint a mental picture of what you hear.**
- **Leave judgments for later.**
- **Don’t interrupt.**
- **Don’t jump to conclusions, leaving the conversation early.**
- **Concentrate, evaluate.**
- **Have intensity, be alert and alive.**
- **Motivate speakers to tell you more—you might be surprised by what you learn.**
- **Listen from speakers’ perspectives—step in their shoes.**
- **Don’t panic when you hear a moment of silence; be patient; wait.**
- **Don’t provide words or complete another’s sentences.**
- **Don’t respond with a change of subjects.**
- **Mentally distinguish between act, opinion and assumption. When in doubt - ask.**

and When. What, Why and How push the door of discovery wide open.

You just never know what will happen when you pay attention and listen. And when you are listening, there are things you can do to improve the communication. Think about the following:

What emotions are you hearing? What is the body broadcasting? Are you looking into a vacant stare?

Looking is part of listening. Do you only hear what you want to hear and forget about the rest? Begin the building on your skill by noticing things, little details. Be a detective.

As you build your skill, you’ll be able to take your listening to new heights, not to mention what you’ll discover for yourself.

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When an attempt at active listening bogs down or is rejected, often one or more of the following mistakes has been made. Experienced active listeners learn to avoid these mistakes.

1. Overshooting -- exaggerating the feeling.
2. Undershooting -- minimizing the feeling.
3. Adding -- putting in an insight which the listener is pushing.
4. Lagging -- repeating previous feedbacks, going back to old material, finally hearing the 15th statement back, etc.
5. Omitting -- ignoring material that the listener wants to extinguish.
6. Rushing -- announcing insight that the person is about to have, beating the person to the punch.
7. Parroting -- not hearing the message the person wants the listener to know, responding only to the code, repeating the code verbatim.
8. Analyzing -- going beyond "message" the person wants listener to know, usually by adding listener's guess as to why the person feels the way he or she does: (because you're . . .")

OTHER ERRORS:

1. Using active listening when helpee's behavior is causing you a problem - when you own the problem.
2. Using active listening when you have a behavioral or attitudinal objective for other person.
3. Using active listening when the person needs specific help or information which you possess. (The principle of "legitimate" dependency.)
4. Active listening without expressing non-verbal empathy. Maintaining detached "professional" manner while feeding back strong emotional content.
5. Focusing feedback on objects of helpee's concern rather than on helpee.
6. Starting each feedback with the same phrase, such as constantly repeating, "What I hear you saying is . . ." Such phrases are occasionally useful and are often a handy help for beginners to stay in the active listening mode. But constant repetition is irritating to the other person.

Unlocking the Silent Prison

Caregivers are learning a better way to communicate with Alzheimer's patients

By Christine Wicker

Eighty year old Mary studied her only daughter's face intently. "You're not my Susan," she said. Susan cried as she recounted the incident to Michelle S. Bourgeois, a speech-pathology professor at Ohio State University who is an expert at communicating with people who have dementia.

That's when Bourgeois suggested that Susan create memory flashcards. "Your mother will never forget you," Bourgeois told her. "She just needs help remembering."

The next week at the nursing home, Susan said, "Mom, I have a gift for you" and gave her two photos. Under one she's written, "This is my daughter Susan at age three"; under the other was "This is my daughter Susan now." Mary studied the photos, then looked at Susan and said, "As beautiful as ever."

Bourgeois is part of a group of scientists whose work marks a sea change in how caregivers deal with people who have dementia, focusing on what they can do rather than on what they've lost. "People tend to treat these patients as if they're not the persons they were," says John Zeisel, president of Hearthstone Alzheimer's Care, Ltd., whose six residences use Bourgeois' techniques. "But they're still here."

Bourgeois work grew out of her Ph.D. research in the 1980s, when she developed some of the first memory books, which use pictures and sentences to help people with memory problems – including Alzheimer's patients – recall past events. Alzheimer's disease, which affect up to 5.3 million Americans, first strikes the hippocampus, the part of the brain that is critical for learning and memory processes. Typically, long-term memory and certain kinds of skills like reading (which is overlearned so it is automatic) are less afflicted.

"Even when dementia is so advanced that people cannot speak, they can read if the words are large enough," Bourgeois explains. "We know because they smile, make pleasant sounds, and stroke photos of loved ones with captions."

In contrast, she says, "Spoken words literally go through one ear and out the other. Patients understand, but they can't store the memory. That's why they ask the same question again and again."

A woman at one of Bourgeois' lectures reported that her father would repeatedly ask, "Where are we going?" during their weekly drives to the doctor. Bourgeois advised her to answer his question – and also write it down on a notepad and give it to him. When he asked again, she should say gently, "The answer is on that notepad." When the woman tried this out, she said that her dad looked at the notepad, out the window, and back at the notepad. After that, he stopped asking, "Where are we going?"

Similar techniques have been used to deal with anger and anxiety in people with dementia. When a patient refused to shower, Bourgeois told her nursing aide to make a card that read, "Shower make me feel fresh and clean" and give it to her after saying it was time to shower. The technique worked.

With a grant from the Alzheimer's Association, Bourgeois hopes to next dispel the belief that Alzheimer's makes people miserable. Using pictures with captions, she is asking patients about their quality of life. "We find that if caregivers aren't stressed and in a hurry, if the patient is well cared for, and if they feel safe and in a good environment, they think their lives are good," she says.

Bourgeois has taught thousands of caregivers her methods, and they've taught thousands more. When she discovered over 20 years ago that memory could be reclaimed with simple tools, she set herself a high goal = one she still holds. "I want families to remember these as happy times in their lives."

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