

Messenger

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Are You Listening?

One of the biggest factors of miscommunication is not listening effectively. Listening is a major factor of our lives; from listening to co-workers, bosses, customers, spouses, and children. For something that never stops, very few of us have good listening skills. In fact, researches claim that “75% of oral communication is ignored, misunderstood, or quickly forgotten.” No matter how well you think you’re listening 1/2 - 1/3 of information heard is forgotten within 8 hours! I know that I’m guilty (as probably you are too) of not always giving my complete attention to a conversation and not even remembering what I said as I walk away.

There are three types of listening skills that I would like to emphasize to help us retain more of what is said to us.

Attending Skills

Attending skills are nonverbal communication that indicates you’re paying close attention to the speaker. It is estimated that 85% of our communication is nonverbal. These skills include:

- Eye contact--this lets the speaker know you have a desire to listen. Poor eye contact gives the impression that you don’t really care about what is being said.
- Posture of involvement--having a relaxed alertness, inclining your body toward the speaker, facing the speaker squarely, maintaining an appropriate distance from the speaker

- Appropriate body motion--not being rigid while listening. Being active during the conversation by nodding, gestures, etc. You must be careful, however, to not have your activity be a distraction. Drumming your fingers and playing with keys or items on a desk can be very distracting to the speaker.
- A non-distracting environment--this may mean setting your phone to go directly to voice mail or closing the door.



Following Skills

An important role of a listener is to listen! Sounds simple, right? It is very common, however, for the listener to constantly interrupt by asking questions and making statements. When this happens, it is often the listener who is driving the conversation. Here are some ways to prevent yourself from being this type of “listener”.

- Door openers--“a noncoercive invitation to talk”. When you notice that someone seems down or really excited, ask if they’d like to share.

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One friend, one person who is truly understanding, who takes the trouble to listen to us as we consider our problems, can change our whole outlook on the world.

Dr. Elton Mayo

The Mathis Group's Messenger

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- Minimal encouragements--brief indicators to the speaker that you are following the conversation. Some examples are, "Really?", "I see", and, the most common, "mm-hmm".
- Open questions--when you feel the need to ask a question, make sure it will require more than a yes/no answer.
- Attentive Silence--this allows the speaker and fully explain what she is trying to tell you. It allows her to form her thoughts without getting distracted. Even though you may not say much, keep your body language attentive so she knows you're paying attention.

Reflecting Skills

During this skill, the listener restates the information to ensure he has heard correctly. This can be done in four ways:




- Paraphrasing--*concisely* restating what was said. When paraphrasing, you don't have to recount the entire conversation. Hit the main points in your own words. This also allows the speaker to clarify any miscommunications.
- Reflecting feelings--when we really listen to what a person is saying and are watching the body language he is giving off, we will know how to respond. Should we be excited along with him? Discouraged? Upset? The speaker wants to know that his *feelings* are also being adequately expressed. Focus on the feeling words that are being said, note the general content of the message, observe the body language, and ask yourself, "What would I be feeling if I was in that situation?"
- Reflecting meanings--this summarizes what you think the person is feeling and why. For example, "You're upset about the recent schedule changes."
- Summative reflections--this is usually used to

restate the "main themes and feelings" of a person "over a longer period of conversation." It will recap several thoughts and feelings that have been expressed. This is a great way to bring a conversation to an end. This can also be used when picking up a conversation that was started at a different time. You do have to be careful using this method, though, because it may have some elements of confrontation in it.

Actively and accurately listening will solve the majority of miscommunications we normally encounter. You must do your part to work at listening the way you would like to be listened to. Next month we will look at assertion skills.

Adapted from *People Skills* by Robert Bolton, Ph.D.



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