

Messenger

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Listen Up!

Listening is something we have been doing all our lives. I would wager to guess that very few of us have ever had any formal training in how to be an effective listener. Why is that? Listening can make or break deals, lead to incorrect assignments being done, and missed opportunities. It is difficult to do business without good listening skills so why should we not actively try to improve our skills?

Ineffective listening is the leading cause of mistakes and misunderstandings at home and at work. Poor listening results in lower productivity, unhappy customers, and a loss of respect by those with whom we work.

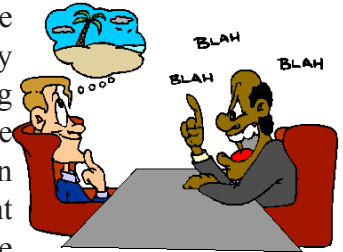
One of the most common complaints by employees is that their supervisor pays no attention to them. However, supervisors say the exact same thing about their employees. Poor listening contributes significantly to lower morale and higher turnovers.

There is, however, a positive side to the listening challenges that we face. Effective listening allows you to discover the needs and expectations of others. It produces better relationships and allows you to benefit from the wisdom and expertise of others. It also helps you to understand and resolve conflict more effectively.

One of the most helpful ways to improve listening is to recognize the four major categories of listening and be aware of what category we are in as a situation unfolds.

The Non-Listener

This type of listener is preoccupied. She isn't really paying attention to the conversation. Instead, she may be thinking about the meeting that is coming up, an email she just received, or a conversation that she had at home the night before. At this point in time, the conversation that is occurring is not a priority to her.



The Marginal Listener

The marginal listener listens then turns inward to decide what to say next. He may listen to the first part of the conversation, but then tune the other person out in order to determine his response. While the beginning of the discussion is important to him, he doesn't hear it all and may miss important information.

The Judgmental Listener

This listener passes judgment on all that is said. Have you ever tried to have a conversation with a person that just criticizes or disagrees with everything that you say? It's very frustrating and annoying! There are very few people who will want to have a conversation with someone who never has anything positive or encouraging to say.

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*Maybe if we did a better job of listening,
history wouldn't have to repeat itself.*

The Mathis Group's Messenger

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The Active Listener

The active listener is focused and empathetic to what is being said. The speaker can tell that this person genuinely wants to hear and be part of the conversation. Eye contact and verbal or non-verbal feedback are ways in which to see that the listener is paying close attention.

There are also some typical barriers to listening that must be overcome.

- A lack of concentration and attention--if your mind keeps wandering, you will not be able to concentrate on the conversation at hand.
- A negative attitude toward the speaker--when having a conversation with a person you don't respect, it is extremely difficult to be unbiased and listen without past history coming to your mind.
- A poor setting for listening--a conversation in a loud hallway or in an office where the phone keeps ringing, distracted listening is bound to happen.
- Highly charged emotions--when you are emotional (whether happy or sad) it is hard to stay focused on any other conversation.
- The speaker's delivery: rate, pitch, etc.--there are some people who naturally have a distracting delivery. Whether the person talks extremely fast or has a squeaky voice, those distractions will hinder your ability to concentrate on what is being said.



Now that we understand some of the challenges we face in being good listeners, let's examine some specific guidelines that will help us be active listeners.

- Avoid trying to listen while doing other things
- Listen for the speaker's main ideas
- Be sensitive to the influence of your emotions
- Fight off distractions
- Separate the message from the messenger

- Deal with anger when you detect it
- Write down key ideas
- Focus and make a commitment to give conscious verbal and non-verbal feedback
- Empathize with the speaker
- Withhold judgment

All of the good ideas and intentions of becoming a better listener will make no difference unless you put them into practice. A good, effective listener will take advantage of opportunities, have more respect from fellow employees, and increase the satisfaction of his or her customers.



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How to Increase Communication

Listening Skills for Life and Work

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The Mathis Group, Inc
Dr. Keith Mathis
106 Lakeview Woods
Eureka, MO 63025
800-224-3731
636/938-5292 voice/fax
keith@themathisgroup.com
www.themathisgroup.com
www.pmexpertlive.com
www.trainthegov.com
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