



Be a Better Listener June 2013

Hello

Listening is a skill. And it is a skill that can improve our performance, both in a professional and a personal capacity. If you are a sales person then you need to listen very well to be able to understand the needs of your potential client. With careful listening you are more likely to make the sale. If you are a leader you need to listen to the people you lead. If you are a boss you need to be good at listening. How else will you know what is really going on in your organization? If you are a parent and you are good at listening to your children you will be a better parent. There is little in life that is not better when we listen well. And in some instances, listening is the greatest gift you can give someone. To listen well takes energy and effort, and is a sign that you really care. And when people get that you really care, you make the sale, you get respect, you win the confidence of your children and employees, and you stand out as a leader.

So how do we become better listeners? I mean, let's face it, of everything we have been taught in life through school, tertiary education, society and the media, how to really listen well, is not usually on the agenda.



*"One of the most sincere forms
of respect is actually listening to
what another has to say."*

~ Bryant H McGill

Below are some exercises to improve your listening skills.

Exercise 1: The "don't interrupt" exercise

Make a habit of not interrupting the person talking to you. This means you stop talking and pay attention to what others are saying. You can only learn about the other person when you keep quiet and listen. Whenever you are in a discussion let the speaker finish before you reply. Check yourself whenever you are having a conversation with someone and see how often you interrupt or are tempted to interrupt.

Exercise 2: Paying attention so you can ask questions

A great exercise to improve listening skills is to ask questions. If you ask questions, then people know you have to be listening to them, you prevent possible misunderstandings, you can keep the conversation interesting, and you develop your listening skills. Don't overdo the questions though or you can become annoying. Set yourself a goal to ask a few questions for some selected conversations you are going to have today.

Exercise 3: Summarizing the conversation

If you are required to summarize a conversation you need to listen carefully. So select some conversations that you will summarize once they are completed, and once the conversation is over write down a summary of the talk. You can check back with the other parties to see if you captured the conversation correctly. With practice you can get really good at this.

Exercise 4: Focus on the other person

Focus on the other person and what they are saying and stop thinking about what you want to say or what reply you want to make. Check yourself at the end of the conversation: How many times did you catch yourself trying to formulate a reply or think about what you wanted to say rather than listen to the other person?

Exercise 5: Pay attention to nonverbal communication clues

True listening means you listen to everything that is said - and that includes what the body language is saying. Does the person seem relaxed? What are they doing with their hands? What messages are their bodies communicating? Does their verbal and nonverbal communication tie up?



Exercise 6: Be yourself

It is important that you feel relaxed and comfortable in a conversation in order to be able to listen well. Start by having conversations with people you feel comfortable with. Notice how you feel. Move onto conversations with others with whom you feel less comfortable and practice getting yourself to relax. Catch yourself during the conversation and make a deliberate effort to relax.

So get practicing, and get better. Have a wonderful June

Best wishes

Penny