

## Communication Skills, Part 3 – Listening

### Could this be true?

- “Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others.” (3)
- “Given all this listening we do, you would think we’d be good at it! In fact we’re not. Depending on the study being quoted, we remember a dismal 25-50% of what we hear. That means that when you talk to your boss, colleagues, customers or spouse for 10 minutes, they only really hear 2½-5 minutes of the conversation.” (3)
- “Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren’t hearing the whole message either. You hope the important parts are captured in your 25- 50%, but what if they’re not?” (3)
- A major source of problem in communication is defensiveness. Effective communicators are aware that defensiveness is a typical response in a work situation especially when negative information or criticism is involved. Be aware that defensiveness is common, particularly with subordinates when you are dealing with a problem. Try to make adjustments to compensate for the likely defensiveness. Realize that when people feel threatened they will try to protect themselves; this is natural. This defensiveness can take the form of aggression, anger, competitiveness, avoidance among other responses. A skillful listener is aware of the potential for defensiveness and makes needed adjustment. He or she is aware that self-protection is necessary and avoids making the other person spend energy defending the self. (1)

### Activate Your Listening Skills

#### Pay attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. Recognize that what is not said also speaks loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly- establish eye contact
- Put aside distracting thoughts. Don’t mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
- “Listen” to the speaker’s body language.
- Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting.
- Listen openly and with empathy

#### Show that you are listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Stop talking, avoid the temptation to jump in
- Nod occasionally
- Smile and use other facial expressions
- Active body, fight distractions
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Attend to non-verbal cues, listen between the lines
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.
- Do not control the conversation, acknowledge what was said

## **Provide feedback**

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. “What I’m hearing is...” and “Sounds like you are saying...” are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. “What do you mean when you say...” “Is this what you mean?”
- Summarize the speaker’s comments periodically.
- Use multiple techniques to comprehend (ask, repeat, rephrase)
- Respond in a way that shows you understand the problem and person’s concern
- Communicate feelings, don’t act out (tell a person you are upset, don’t get angry)

## **Defer judgment**

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish.
- Don’t interrupt with counterarguments.
- Make sure you comprehend before you judge- ask questions
- Judge the content, not the speaker

## **Respond Appropriately**

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person as he or she would want to be treated.
- React to the message, not the person

## **Key Points:**

- “It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening habits are as bad as many people’s are, then there’s a lot of habit-breaking to do!” (3)
- “Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself constantly that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message. Ask question, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don’t, then you’ll find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different!” (3)

## **References used for this document:**

- (1) <http://web.cba.neu.edu/~ewertheim/interper/commun.htm>
- (2) <http://www.psu.edu/dus/cfe/actvlstn.htm>
- (3) <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>