

Effective Listening

Leaders must be sensitive to what their followers express in daily communication. Expressing our own wants, feelings, thoughts, and opinions clearly and effectively is only half of the communication process needed for interpersonal effectiveness. When a person decides to communicate with another person, s/he does so to fulfill a need. In deciding to communicate, the person selects the medium, tone, language, etc. that s/he believes will effectively deliver the message to the other person. The code used to send the message can be either verbal or nonverbal. When the other person receives the message, they go through the process of interpreting it into understanding and meaning. Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets and understands the sender's message in the same way the sender intended it.



*God gave us two ears but only one mouth
because listening is twice as hard as talking.*

Effective Listening is Not...

- Being preoccupied and blocking out the speaker.
- Being so interested in what you have to say that you listen mainly to find an opening to get the floor.
- Formulating and listening to your own rebuttal instead of what the speaker is saying.
- Listening to your own personal beliefs about what is being said.
- Evaluating and making judgments about the speaker or the message.
- Forgetting to ask clarifying questions when you do not understand something.

True effective listening is the difference between hearing a string of words and listening for a message. Obtaining true understanding of the speaker's message is difficult because there are so many styles of communication.

Tips for Effective Listening:

- Usually it is important to paraphrase and use your own words in verbalizing your understanding of the message. Parroting back the words verbatim is annoying and does not ensure accurate understanding of the message. Ask the person, "Is this an accurate summary of what you meant...?"
- Each message is filled with different aspects. Listen for various components to see what the speaker is trying to get across:
 1. Facts
 2. Thoughts and beliefs
 3. Feelings and emotions
 4. Wants, needs, or motivation
 5. Hopes and expectations
- Know when to quit using active listening. Once you accurately understand the sender's message, it may be appropriate to respond with your own message. Do not use active listening to hide and avoid revealing your own position.
- If you are confused and know you do not understand, either tell the person you don't understand and ask him/her to say it another way, or use your best guess. If you are incorrect, the person will realize it and will likely attempt to correct your misunderstanding.
- Use eye contact and listening body language. Avoid checking your cell phone or looking at other people or activities around the room. Face and lean toward the speaker and nod your head, as it is appropriate. Be careful about crossing your arms and appearing closed or critical.
- Be empathic and nonjudgmental. You can be accepting and respectful of the person and their feelings and beliefs without invalidating or giving up your own position, or without agreeing with the accuracy and validity of their view.

Other Things to Watch For...

- Loud rooms are not conducive to good conversation. Feel free to pause and ask the other person to move to a quieter location.
- Know your own prejudices. Do not label people as liberal, dead head, or wise guy. You will find that people are unique and have opinions different from your assumptions about them.
- Break the rules if necessary! If the communication is not happening, just stop for the day and go for coffee or a treat. Resume the conversation later.