

Improve your listening skills

Work Zones. Pay Attention or pay the price.

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

Look at the speaker directly.

Put aside distracting thoughts.

Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!

Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.

"Listen" to the speaker's body language.

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

Nod occasionally.

Smile and use other facial expressions.

Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.

Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.



2. Show That You're Listening

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.

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"



3. Provide Feedback

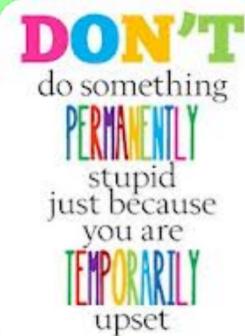
defer judgment

4. Defer Judgment

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

Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.

Don't interrupt with counter arguments.



5. 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 in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.



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!

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently 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 questions, 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!

Start using active listening today to become a better communicator, improve your workplace productivity, and develop better relationships.