



Leaders Listen

7 Tips to Help with Everyday Communication

1. Listen with all your senses

Listening involves far more than your ears. Create a picture of the conflict or the problem by visualizing the conversation. Become an empathetic listener to show support. Try to feel what the speaker is saying because once you tap into the emotions behind a conversation, you'll better understand the issues. Don't forget to listen for what is not being said, but is being communicated via body language, gestures, pitch and volume of voice and you will reach a clearer understanding sooner. Always remain authentic because a feigned interest is easy to discern and it destroys the trust that an effective conversation necessitates.

Listening skills are essential to effective executive communication

2. Slow down

Quiet your mind and follow the speed of the discussion. The average pace of speech is only 125 words per minute and it's easy to race ahead in an exchange. Don't rush to finish other people's sentences, don't interrupt or offer unsolicited advice. Presuming to know what will be said next or attempting to move things along will not lead to productive results.

3. Suspend judgment

Keeping an open mind while listening can be tough because most of us hear through a filter of our own experiences, biases and beliefs. Try to adopt the other's perspective. Don't offer premature solutions before understanding or jumping to conclusions. Suspend judgment until you have had a moment to reflect.

4. Lean in

No, really – lean forward and become engaged in the exchange. Active listening includes non-verbal cues that signal that you are involved in what is being said as well as in the potential outcome of the exchange. Physical feedback from you, the listener, is important to help both parties stay focused. Offer non-verbal feedback including nodding to convey understanding, but not necessarily agreement, maintain eye contact and appear relaxed but attentive.

5. Verbalize

Another aspect of active listening is providing verbal feedback and encouragement. Ask questions when the speaker pauses. Seek clarification to show involvement and summarize the situation to assure understanding. Remember and repeat back key words and use phrases like "go on" or "uh huh" to keep the conversational flow moving, but don't interrupt until there is an obvious break in the discourse.

6. Be attentive and respectful

It seems simple enough to be respectful, but in today's world of electronic distractions, interruptions and multi-tasking, it may be harder to show you care. Put down your cell phone, stop checking your email and politely tell anyone who interrupts that you will get back with them when you are done here. The speaker deserves your undivided attention and things are likely to move along faster if everyone is fully engaged

7. Pay attention

Don't worry about how you will make tonight's meeting or your child's soccer game. Just focus on the conversation at hand. Jam-packed itineraries allow us to lead full lives and technology may keep us infinitely connected, but both have a way of raising stress, eating up time and blocking effective communication.

Listening is a foundation on which leadership is built and it is about more than hearing what others have to say. Listening helps you to understand motivations, form decisions, craft solutions, improve your own and others' performance and cultivate a culture of productivity and symbiosis. Most importantly, listening is a portable skill that will not only differentiate you, an executive and a leader, but it will also ease a path in your personal life with friends, family and the community as a whole.



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A key component of leadership, listening skills are essential to effective executive communication. However, according to *Harvard Business Review*, listening is one of the toughest skills to master. Becoming a better listener involves self-discipline and active development of new habits.

The old adage of "listen twice and speak once" is still good advice. Define yourself as a listener and you will instantly be more attuned to the critical issues in your environment. To grasp more meaning from your interactions, practice listening for understanding and try these tips to make every conversation count.