

Listening Skills

Lesson Objectives:

- Describe the characteristics of good listening
- Explain the effects of poor listening skills
- Explain the importance of positive non-verbal communication
- List ways you can improve your listening skills
- Exhibit listening skills

Please read the information below about listening skills.

Listening, as defined in THE CONSOLIDATED WEBSTER COLLEGE REFERENCE DICTIONARY, is attending closely with a view to hear.

As reflected in this definition, effective listening is a mental process--it does not merely consist of the ability to hear. While listening, you:

1. identify key words
2. mentally summarize the topic of conversation
3. apply prior learning to the conversation (common sense)

There are many components of effective listening. These include:

Body Language. The way you are sitting or standing can convey many messages to the speaker.

For effective listening, your body will be turned toward the speaker. Your hands should be in your lap if you are seated, or at your sides if you are standing. Crossed arms convey the message that you disagree with the speaker. Your eyes should be focused on the speaker to demonstrate your full attention.

Your body should be reflecting your interest and attention to the speaker's ideas.

Attitude. Like body language, your attitude can be heard without opening your mouth! Effective listening requires you to keep an open mind. Do *not* dwell on prior attitudes about the

speaker and/or the topic.

Attention. Focusing your attention on a speaker is a skill that can be reinforced through practice. To increase your attention:

1. use positive body language
2. focus your eyes on the speaker
3. deliberately focus your attention on each of the speaker's thoughts
4. mentally summarize in your own thoughts what the speaker is saying

Notetaking. Taking notes while listening is an effective way to remember precise details. Office workers often take notes to help them remember important dates, figures, appointments, etc.

Questioning. Asking *related* questions results in two benefits:

1. your understanding is improved
2. the speaker is reinforced by the fact that you are listening

Questions should focus on key points and, therefore, improve and clarify the communication.

Active Listening

An effective technique when communication is between two people, is the use of ACTIVE LISTENING. Also called paraphrasing, active listening is a method that allows the listener to restate (or paraphrase) what the speaker is saying. The result is improved understanding for the listener and reinforcement to the speaker that the message was received. Some general guidelines for active listening as listed in Johnson & Johnson's book LEARNING TOGETHER AND ALONE are:

1. Restate the sender's expressed ideas and feelings in your own words rather than mimicking or parroting his/her exact words.
2. Preface paraphrased remarks with, "You think...", "Your position is...", "It seems to you that...", "You feel that...", and so on.

3. Avoid any indication of approval or disapproval.
4. Make your nonverbal messages congruent with your verbal paraphrasing; look attentive, interested, and open to the sender's ideas and feelings, and show that you are concentrating upon what the sender is trying to communicate.
5. State as accurately as possible what you heard the sender say and describe the feelings and attitudes involved.
6. Do not add to or subtract from the sender's message.
7. Put yourself in the sender's shoes and try to understand what it is he/she is feeling and what his/her message means. (p. 102)

Summary

Effective listening is a skill that is necessary in every worker. Concentrating on putting effective listening techniques into use will improve your overall job performance.