

effective listening

(ī-fēk'tīv līs'ən ɪŋ)

v. understanding the meaning of another person's words – and the ideas and feelings behind them

Since most of us are not born with effective listening skills, the following tips may help you become a better listener:

Active silence. When you are listening, speak only when you need clarification or to summarize what you have heard. Don't be afraid of silence!

Summarize. It is a good idea to summarize, in your own words, what the speaker has told you. This allows you to ensure you have heard everything correctly and shows the speaker you are truly listening.



Avoid distractions. Let your speaker know that he or she is your main focus.

Nonverbals. The way you present yourself often determines what or how much your speaker will tell you. If your nonverbals relay the message that you are uninterested or bored, your speaker will pick up on that. The following nonverbal cues will help communicate that you are listening effectively:

- Maintain eye contact
- Keep your posture open and relaxed (avoid crossing your arms)
- Avoid looking at your watch
- Nod and smile – let your speaker know you are still listening



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Schedule appropriately. Schedule important meetings or conversations for times when you're least likely to be tired, interrupted, or distracted.

Stay calm. If your speaker is using highly emotional words or becoming visibly upset, remain calm. If you allow yourself to become over-stimulated by what is being said, you will not be able to focus on the main point.



Wait your turn. Don't interrupt to correct the speaker, finish the speaker's sentence, or change the subject.

Be patient. Don't form opinions or make decisions until the speaker is finished. Give the speaker a chance to elaborate or correct a mistake – wait a moment before speaking.

A person with good listening skills:

- Concentrates on the speaker
- Interprets the speaker's words
- Evaluates their meaning
- Responds effectively

Once you have developed effective listening skills, you may find others increasing their trust in you. Not only do effective listening skills improve your leadership ability, they improve your interpersonal relationships as well.

References:

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc (1987). How to improve your listening skills.
The Leader Reader. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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