



Are You a Good Listener?

- Have you ever pretended to be listening when you are not?
- Do you know how to look interested when your mind wanders far away?
- Do you ever “tune out” people when their ideas are boring or difficult?
- Do you find it difficult to concentrate on ideas when a speaker’s appearance or mannerisms are strange?

Most people would answer “yes” to one or more of these questions because we have developed poor listening habits. Basically, we are not paying attention to the speaker. Poor listening habits can be costly in business.

Barriers and Distractions

- **External Distractions:** It is difficult to listen well if you are distracted by background noises such as other people talking, noisy machinery, traffic, etc.
- **Internal Distractions:** How you feel determines how well you listen. If you’re tired, hungry, sick or worried about something, you may have problems focusing on what is being said.
- **Overload:** When people give too much information at one time or use words that are unfamiliar, you may feel overwhelmed and just stop listening.

Good Listening Habits

- **Focus your Attention:** Look at the speaker. Tune out external distractions. If possible, turn off noisy machinery or move to a quieter place. Don’t think about how they are saying something; focus on what they are saying and not on what you are thinking. Listen to listen. Don’t listen and also plan what you are going to say next.
- **Show You’re Listening:** Be responsive. Maintain eye contact with the speaker. Look interested in what she or she is saying. An occasional “yes” or “I see”, or a head nod lets the speaker know you are listening.
- **Ask Questions:** Asking relevant questions is one of the best ways to show a speaker that you have been listening. In a work situation, many people are shy about asking questions; they think it makes them look bad to the employer. The only thing that will make you look bad in an employer’s eyes is not doing the job correctly. Employers want you to ask questions.

Know How to Ask Questions

“I know what I want to ask...I just don’t know how to ask it.”

One of the most important things to think about when phrasing your question is . . . how to get to the point. Make your questions as direct as possible. You don’t want the speaker to begin his answer to you with “I’m not really sure what you are asking.” Be clear and concise; don’t add details that don’t matter to your question or the answer.



Think about the question you want answered. Begin your sentence with phrases like:

- "Can you re-phrase . . .?"
- "I don't understand what you meant by . . .?"
- "I've never . . . before. Can you show me how to . . .?"
- "Can you repeat that?"
- "How do I . . .?"



Paraphrasing and Clarifying

This means mirroring the information back to the speaker in order to make sure you understand exactly what they want you to do. Clarifying means asking for more information to make something clearer. Some phrases you could use are:

- "So, what you're asking me is . . .?"
- "So, what you're saying is . . .?"
- "So, what I need to do is . . .?"

When you paraphrase the information in your own words, the employer will know that you understand what it is you are supposed to do. It will also help you to remember if you are an auditory learner.

Take Notes

When given verbal instructions, you may only get one or two chances to hear the information. You have to process, understand and remember all of it quickly. Carrying a small notebook with you is a good idea. Make short notes for yourself or draw simple sketches to help you remember the details. There is nothing wrong with making notes. It shows your boss that you want to do the job right.