

Listening is the most important part of communication – Avoid disaster by following these 7 rules of listening.

I learned the following rules of effective listening soon after becoming a Team manager. I recognised that to successfully influence people to do what I want and to encourage performance improvement in others I needed to listen to my people. Listening makes people feel valued and important. It builds rapport quickly and people begin to trust you. Once people know, like and trust you it's much easier to achieve your desired results.

Rule 1 - Act like a good listener.

We spend a lot of time deflecting unwanted information that comes our way. It therefore becomes important to change our physical body language from that of a deflector to that of a receiver. Our faces contain most of the receptive equipment in our bodies, so we should turn our faces towards the speaker. It will encourage the person to keep speaking. The moment you turn away they will think you have lost interest

Rule 2 - Look at the other person.

Your eyes pick up the non-verbal signals that all people send out when they are speaking. By looking at the speaker, your eyes will also complete the eye contact that speakers are trying to make. A speaker will work harder at sending out the information when they see a receptive audience. Making eye contact helps you to build rapport with the person. You can learn more about how the other person is feeling and pick up on non-verbal messages. Avoiding eye contact could show a lack of confidence.

Rule 3 - React to the speaker.

When you have established eye and face contact with your speaker, you must then react by sending out non-verbal signals. Your face must move and give the range of emotions that indicate whether you are following what the speaker has to say. A good listener involves all of their face to be an active listener. This happens naturally when you are listening to friends and family. If you make no response the speaker will be discouraged and start to form negative opinions.

Rule 4 - stop talking and use receptive language instead

It is extremely difficult to listen when you're talking. A good listener will stop talking and use receptive language instead. Use "*I see oh really*", type phrases and encourage your speaker's train of thought. This forces you to react to the ideas presented, rather than to the person. You can then move to asking questions, instead of giving your opinion. In reality people are often thinking about what they are going to say next rather than really listening to the person.

Rule 5 - Concentrate on what the speaker is saying

You need to concentrate right up until they finish speaking. You cannot fully hear their point of view or process information, when you judge what they are saying before they have finished. Resist the temptation to interrupt or start talking before the speaker has finished so that you can get your point of view across. Some people often pause for thought and then carry on with what they want to say. You risk misinterpreting and jumping to the wrong conclusions which will irritate the speaker and cause a breakdown in rapport.

Rule 6 – Send signals to the speaker

When good listeners don't understand what's being said, they will send signals to the speaker about what they expect next, or how the speaker can change the speed of information delivery to suit the listener. If you have established a good connection with the speaker they will spot that you have a frown on your face or if you are fidgeting because you need a comfort break and then take action to correct the situation.

Rule 7 – Keep your mind open

When we listen to another person, all of our personal prejudices and preferences can come into play. Try and recognise these unhelpful distortions for what they are, and keep your mind open to what is being said. We all see the world from a different viewpoint made up of different rules, values and standards. When you listen effectively you start to understand the view of the other person which helps you to better communicate, so enhancing the results that you achieve. Be open to all possibilities.

How effectively do you listen?

These are the 4 Levels of Listening:-

1. No listening - Day dreaming and looking out the window.
2. Listening to the words - Looking apparently listening but nothing going in.
3. Listening beyond the words - Thinking about what is being said or meant.
4. Active listening - All their receptors on high alert, like your best friend is going to tell you something really special that no one else knows. Open body language, eyes glistening and very keen to know what's coming.

To be truly successful you need to be an active listener.

To be an active listener you need to act like a good listener by looking at the person, making eye contact and reacting appropriately. Stop talking and concentrate on what the person is saying and send signals when you don't understand. And keep an open mind! The response that you will get from the other person will be tremendous. If it is important that you build a relationship with this person be it business or friendship then start by listening to them. Take an interest in them to build rapport and trust and see what effect this has. Alternatively you can ignore people or go straight in and tell them all about yourself and what you need and what you want them to do for you – then watch the response! I can guarantee that you will not get the most out of them, if anything!

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