

LISTENING IS A SKILL

Communication is a process that involves the relaying of messages between a sender and a receiver. For it to be effective, the sender and the receiver must be able to engage at a level that allows each person to understand the message and give relevant feedback. Not so many people have what it takes to communicate effectively. For that reason, the ability to communicate and reach the communication goal is considered a skill. This includes, but is not limited to, knowing how to craft a message in a manner that best suits the receiver, as well as the receiver's ability to listen attentively to the message and interpret it correctly, providing feedback that aids in achieving the communication goals.

Listening is a skill that is often overlooked. This is evident in some of the discussions that are turned into arguments. In that position, each part wants to be heard but has no time to listen. Some of the issues are simply things that could be easily solved if someone took their time to listen and respond within context. Within the work environment, a lack of listening skills can have tremendous implications for the company, as will be shown later on.

How is listening a skill?

As previously mentioned, one cannot effectively participate in a communication process if one lacks good listening skills. As a result, it is imperative for people in general, and most importantly in the workplace, to cultivate good listening skills. Apart from just learning the skill, it is also important to know how to apply it at different levels. Listening, in its true sense, is deeper than merely hearing sounds and identifying the words that come from the communicator. It requires the following:

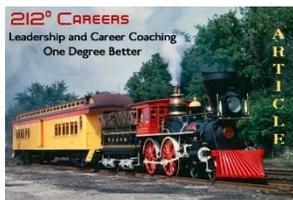
- **The patience to allow the communicator to put across their message without interrupting them** - interrupting someone as they are trying to communicate changes the level of engagement in many different ways. This includes a high chance of missing the point and losing the direction of the engagement, confusing the communicator, and making them feel disrespected and less confident in what they are communicating, among other things. A quick response indicates that we are not listening.
- **The patience or ability to listen attentively until the other person finishes talking** - some people find it hard to pay attention for a specific time. However, this too is something one can train oneself to deal with. It is essential to find something that motivates you or helps you get back on track when you're losing focus. In terms of presentations, being an active participant at all times makes it easier to follow throughout the seminar. One can take notes, ask questions, or make contributions to keep oneself from losing focus.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SECRETS

- **The ability to process what is being said and understand the message correctly** – failure to understand and interpret a message correctly can cause serious problems within the work environment. Instructions are given out, customers call, and colleagues make requests. As an employee, if you cannot put enough effort into ensuring that you hear and understand what is communicated, you risk causing issues and crises for the company, yourself, or your colleagues. This includes considering the speaker’s viewpoint, that is, why they understand things the way they do and why they choose to use certain words over others. This broadens our understanding of the message and helps us make valuable contributions.
- **The ability to attach the right emotions to what is communicated** – this has more to do with how we weigh or judge the message as the communicator speaks. It determines how much of our time and attention we choose to invest in the communication process. We tend to change our approach and attitudes towards the communication goal based on how we judge the communicator and the message. It is, therefore, advisable that we avoid any form of judgment as we listen to stay focused and avoid missing important points that may follow. This further shapes our responses, as well as their relevance and tone.
- **Asking for clarity where a message is hard to understand** – asking for clarity is a sure way of avoiding taking the message out of context and misusing information.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SECRETS

Therefore, listening involves a lot more than just hearing sounds and identifying words. It is a skill people need to develop and cultivate to communicate effectively. Ask yourself about the reason for being part of the communication process, and remind yourself of this as you listen. This further requires discipline, resisting one's ego, and overcoming the temptation to argue or convince others to accept your views. Poor listening can ruin relationships.



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