



Barriers to Effective Listening

Beware of these barriers to effective listening! Learn to recognize them when they appear and find ways to overcome them.

- Hearing impairments
- Noise
- Personal biases
- Busyness
- Short attention span
- Interruptions
- Lack of interest
- Language/cultural differences
- Multitasking
- Thoughts of personal matters

Listening at Work

According to a Department of Labor study, listening is a basic skill essential to success in the workplace. Time and money can be saved when workers listen. Mistakes can be avoided. In some cases, accidents in the workplace can be prevented. Listening helps resolve problems with coworkers, bosses, or customers.

Good listeners understand what they are expected to do. In the workplace, supervisors give directions to help workers complete a task. The directions may be given in a step-by-step format. Workers must listen carefully to each step in the instructions. By following the instructions one step at a time and in the order given, a complicated job can be completed with ease.

In addition, workers must be active listeners. Failure to ask questions can result in further misunderstanding, which then leads to mistakes or accidents. In addition, most supervisors and other workers appreciate the feedback an active listener provides. Customers do as well. For example, a waitress who simply nods as a customer talks to her rather than smiling and acknowledging the customer's request verbally may be setting herself up for a smaller tip.

Teamwork is the foundation of businesses. Listening improves the spirit of teamwork among employees. Listening to others shows respect and builds rapport with supervisors and coworkers. Supervisors feel more confident that their message is understood when employees show active listening skills. Customers feel valued when employees listen to them. You will feel like your opinion matters if coworkers and bosses take the time to listen to you.



Listening to a Supervisor's Instructions

Listening to instructions to complete a task is a highly valued skill in the workplace. Follow these steps to listen effectively on the job:

1. Look at the supervisor as he or she speaks.
2. Notice words that he or she stresses.
3. Watch for anything he or she writes down.
4. Listen to each step in the instructions.
5. Take notes to help you remember each step.
6. Do not interrupt. Wait until the supervisor has finished speaking.
7. Ask questions to clarify the instructions.

Listening to Advance

President Calvin Coolidge once said “No man ever listened himself out of a job.” Think about this. How many people do you know who lost a job because they listened? On the other hand, how many people do you know who lost a job because they *didn't*?

Effective leaders are good listeners. According to business experts, the higher one's position in a company the more time that individual spends listening. Being silent is hard work. Listening is not a natural talent for most people. You must consciously practice listening skills.

Learning to listen has rewards. When opportunities for advancement come, good listening skills will reflect positively on your work record. An employee who has exercised the ability to listen and follow directions will earn the respect of her supervisor. If you want to advance on the job, learn to listen. Remember good leaders are good listeners.





Check Your Vocabulary

Read the vocabulary list. These words appear in this chapter. Read the following definitions, and place the letter of the correct word on the line in front of the definition.

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|----------------------|-----------------|
| A hearing | F evaluating |
| B listening | G eye contact |
| C hearing impairment | H body language |
| D passive listening | I pitch |
| E active listening | J monotone |

1. ____ A physical condition that limits a person's ability to hear sounds.
2. ____ Listening in which the listener responds by concentrating on the speaker's words. The listener may ask questions of the speaker.
3. ____ Movements and actions such as hand gestures and body posture.
4. ____ An unchanging voice, expressing no emotion or interest.
5. ____ The physical ability to perceive sound.
6. ____ The process of interpreting and judging the speaker's message in order to decide how to respond.
7. ____ Listening with little or no response to the speaker.
8. ____ How high or low the speaker's voice is.
9. ____ Looking directly at the speaker while he is talking.
10. ____ The process of hearing a speaker's words *and* understanding the speaker's message.

Summing It Up

Being a skilled listener is valuable in every part of your life. Listening includes being able to physically hear and mentally process the information gathered. Taking the time to listen to friends and family will improve your social relationships. Good listening skills are equally important in the workplace. Employers consistently rank listening among the most desirable basic work skills.

The passive listener processes the information but shows little or no response to it. The active listener processes the information and responds by questioning and evaluating the speaker's opinions. Often, a listener must evaluate what the speaker is communicating. The listener must observe the speaker's words, gestures, and emotions.

Both the social and work worlds highly value the skill of listening. Listening employees are valued because they can follow instructions and think before they act. Those who listen often make better leaders and have a better chance of advancing in their careers. With practice, you can be a better listener.