



KING FAHD UNIVERSITY OF PETROLEUM & MINERALS

PERSONAL SKILLS PROGRAM

**HOW
TO
LISTEN
EFFECTIVELY**

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INTRODUCTION

Many people think listening is easy. Perhaps this is true because you have confused the physical act of hearing with the more complex process of listening.

Although many have spent a lifetime hearing people speak, few have learned the skill of listening. It is not a passive but an active skill that must be learned and practiced.

In addition, you must have set a goal beforehand, just as in any communication task.

You hear with your ears, but listening involves your intellectual, psychological and physical powers.

Managers need to listen about 40 percent of their workday, but a recent study shows that their listening effectiveness is only about 25 percent. Another report showed that workers listening to instructions or presentations hear about 40 percent, understand 25 percent and, after a few days, remember only 5 percent of the information given. This low level of effectiveness costs companies lost time and money.

Listening errors and inefficient techniques cause workplace injuries, management/subordinate disagreements, employee problems, mistakes in filling customers' requests and even cancellations of contracts.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING AND BARRIERS

Because the effective listener works to receive complete information, he saves time since the job is done correctly the first time; it helps to see if people understand information or not because questions and comments are encouraged; and it creates a cooperative and productive work environment because workers' ideas and problems are listened to fully and correctly.

These benefits are so important that major multinational corporations such as General Motors, AT&T and others have invested millions of dollars and thousands of hours in listening training for their managers and employees. In fact, when I consulted for AT&T and Duracell Battery in the late 1980s, attendance at the listening seminars was mandatory for managers and their assistants.

In these seminars, it was shown that effective listeners need to overcome several external and internal barriers to listening. [see 9 keys to effective listening]

There are 3 major categories of barriers:

- 1) Physical
- 2) Emotional
- 3) Psychological

1) **Physical.** External barriers at the office may be the noise from computers, telephones, talking employees, street traffic or other physical distractions such as a boring speaker or an uncomfortable room that prevent you from listening properly.

2) **Emotional.** Examples of internal barriers are poor health, empty stomach, and tiredness which prevent the person from concentrating fully on what is being said.

3) **Psychological.** This category includes biases, cultural differences, lack of interest or motivation to concentrate, along with boredom.

In this category, the most damaging internal factor is our own brain. Scientific research shows that we can think about four times faster than we can speak, which adds up to about 125 spoken words to every 500 we think. [see # 9 below]

125 spoken words to every 500 we can think

So, as our brain becomes bored with the slowness of the spoken word, it is easy to understand why our minds wander to other subjects during a conversation, speech or lecture.

9 TACTICS TO MORE EFFECTIVE LISTENING

These problems are complex, but don't despair. You can learn to modify your approach to listening and become more effective by practicing the following nine tactics.

1) **Listening for things you can use.**

You can always learn something from what is being said.

Ask yourself:

"What can I use?" "What is important for me?" Then, identify the main and supporting points. Finally summarize the entire message.

2) **Judge the message, not the messenger.**

His physical appearance, nationality or accent should not influence your opinion. This is easier said than done, but you must try your best.

3) **Listen for the feelings behind the facts.**

Listen for the emotional content of his message.

* Sometimes the way he says something means more than the words he uses.

4) **Wait until the speaker finishes.**

Do not formulate or "pre-plan" your response, especially

* when you feel you disagree. Listen completely, or you may miss the full meaning as you think about your great

response. You may also find the speaker saying to you "That's what just said! Weren't you listening to me?"

5) **Resist Psychological Barriers.**

Avoid wandering and daydreaming, as you have not filtered out from your mind the problems in tips 2 and 4 above.

3 Barriers to Listening

Preplanning – thinking of your response while the other person is talking.

Wandering – when you hear a word and that makes your mind "wander" to the memory or event related to that word. This is usually involuntary.

Daydreaming – This is voluntary. For some reason, you do not want to listen so you "dream" about another subject or event without sleeping.

6) **Resist physical distractions.**

Sounds, people and office environment can disrupt listening. Find a quiet area. Pick a free, relaxed time so you can concentrate on the message. Avoid trying to listen to someone in your office while you talk on the telephone or while you are being interrupted by other people. You will not be able to listen – we can only do one thing at a time properly and fully.

7) **Take notes and ask questions.**

Take written notes, if possible, but do not write every word of the speaker. Instead, outline. Later, summarize and fill in details. Asking appropriate questions helps to fully understand instructions, new information or complex, technical ideas.

8) **Exercise your mind.**

Concentrate on the main points, then summarize them. Try to visualize or imagine the situation in your mind. Connect the message with a related, personal experience and you will remember the information better and longer. Although difficult at first, these will become easier with time.

9) **Take advantage of "think time."**

People can think up to four times faster than the average person speaks. So, the effective listener should apply the extra thinking time to what has been said. After mentally listing the main points already spoken, anticipate the next main idea.

This way, you can prevent **wandering and daydreaming.**