



**Helping individuals and companies
break out of their comfort zones
to become more successful**

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5 More Ways to Be a Better Listener

Listening is a crucial skill for success in business and in life. If we listen to others, we show them respect, we learn to understand their points of view and we help to build our relationships.

Here are 5 more ways to improve your listening skills:

1. Show empathy. Empathy means that you understand the feelings that the other person has expressed. Understanding the feelings doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with them. And remember the old adage, "you can't fake sincerity." If you're not genuinely concerned about someone, pretending that you care doesn't count as active listening.
2. Beware your filters. In order to manage the information overload that bombards us daily, we all use selective attention, or filters, to decide what is important and what we should pay attention to. Filters help us survive, but we have to be careful about how we develop them because bias and stereotypes can creep in and become barriers to communication. Any time you make an "always" or "never" statement, or automatically agree or disagree with someone because of what you think you know about them, or people like them, you are losing out on a chance to listen and learn. Filters like "IT people never deliver projects on time" or "Engineers always make things too complicated" or "_____ [fill in the blank with any category or group of people] always/never..." shut down our listening and get in the way of true communication.
3. Paraphrase. In order to ensure that the message you are receiving is the same message that the other person is sending, restate in your own words what you think the person said. For example, "If I understand you correctly, what you're saying is..." or "I want to make sure I understand you – you disagree with the idea because..."
4. Be aware of the time. Active listening takes time in your already crowded schedule. If you only have a few minutes, let the other person know; "I'd like to listen to you, but I have a meeting in 10 minutes. Is 10 minutes enough?" If you consistently hold to the time limit and really spend that limited time listening, most people will condition themselves to get to the point within the time limit. (Yes, there are people who go on and on with no regard to anyone else's time, but those are the exceptions and have to be dealt with separately).

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5. Ask open-ended questions. To get more information, ask "how" and "what" questions rather than interrogate the person with questions that only require a "yes" or "no" answer. Questions like "how do you think we should handle it?" and "what is your opinion about it" will open up the conversation and give them the opportunity to share their ideas. Once you ask the question, however, be sure to listen to the answer.

The next time you're in a conversation, focus on listening actively to the other person. The more you practice this skill, the easier it will become. And you'll find that as you listen more effectively, you'll learn more and improve your business and personal relationships.

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