



The Guide to Better Listening |

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

You can download it, print, and read the material. You can forward it by email to colleagues, customer, friends, and family members, you can even mail them a copy if you need to slow things down a bit.

## WHAT YOU CAN'T DO...

Please don't let the material go to waste. Use it as a fun reminder of the importance of listening.

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# 5 Ways to Better Listening

1. TALK LESS
2. BE APPROACHABLE & RECEPTIVE
3. GIVE YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION
4. MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE BODY LANGUAGE
5. WORK TO UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE

Are you a smover?



Find out at [SmileAndMove.com/Video](http://SmileAndMove.com/Video)

The most  
valuable of  
all talents...  
that of  
never  
using two  
words  
where one  
will do.

TALK LESS

DON'T

Continue talking if you sense the speaker is disinterested or confused

Talk just to fill silence... make sure what you say has value for both you and the listener

DO

Add a small gap of silence (just a beat or two) between the end of the speaker's thoughts and your response... it will minimize your tendency to interrupt and may encourage the speaker to open up more

Use as few words as possible to get your point across when speaking

THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826)  
THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.

Everyone  
should be  
quick to  
listen, slow  
to speak.

JAMES 1:19

BE APPROACHABLE & RECEPTIVE

DON'T

Finish sentences for others...  
interrupting sends a message that what  
you have to say is more important and  
can diminish the speaker's sense of  
control and importance

Try to persuade others without fully  
listening to their point of view... you  
might end up learning something  
that could change your viewpoint

DO

Genuinely want to listen...  
authentic sincerity creates an  
atmosphere of trust

Be receptive to the speaker's needs  
– he might just need you to listen,  
and not try to fix his problem...  
sometimes being listened to is enough

Listen with a nonjudgmental attitude

Allow the speaker to fully explain  
her position, problem, etc., before  
jumping in with your reply... not  
interrupting gives the speaker a  
sense of importance and a potential  
self-esteem boost

Smile

Look at the speaker with interest,  
but not with a quizzical expression  
that may imply something is wrong

If you want  
to be  
listened to,  
you should  
put in time  
listening.

MARGE PIERCY (1936- )  
AMERICAN POET & NOVELIST

GIVE THE SPEAKER YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION

DON'T

Tune out if the speaker takes too long to make a point or doesn't speak clearly, or if you're not interested in the topic of discussion

Look at your watch or the clock when others are talking, or become distracted by other people or activity in the immediate area – frequent eye contact should help you stay focused

DO

Stop whatever you're doing to completely focus on the discussion

Eliminate distractions... turn off your email and IM, send all calls to voicemail, and close the door to limit outside distractions, if necessary

Face the speaker directly and make frequent eye contact to let him know that what he's saying is important to you

Acknowledge key points with a nod, smile or brief comment – "I see," "I understand," "right," etc. – but be careful to not be too repetitive with your comments, as it can make you seem insincere

Knowing when to keep your mouth shut is invariably more important than opening it at the right time.

MALCOLM FORBES (1919-1990)  
AMERICAN PUBLISHER

## MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE BODY LANGUAGE

### DON'T

Fiddle with a pen, jewelry, clothing, etc., rather than looking at the speaker

Cross your arms... closing off your body can suggest you're defensive or not open to ideas

### DO

Make eye contact (but don't stare) and lean slightly forward to show your interest

Face the speaker directly and keep fidgeting to a minimum

Stand or sit close enough to the speaker to show your interest, but not so close as to make her uncomfortable

Gently nod your head to acknowledge a point and encourage the speaker to continue

Change your facial expression (a smile or a concerned look) to show you understand

Adjust your chair so you're eye level with the speaker to avoid creating an atmosphere of superiority

Pay attention to the speaker's body language... her tone or volume of voice, facial expressions, body movements and gestures may have a different meaning than her words (e.g., she says she's excited about a project, but speaks in a flat tone while sitting back in her chair)

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.

PETER DRUCKER (1909-2005)  
AUSTRIAN-AMERICAN  
ECONOMIST & AUTHOR

SINCERELY WORK TO UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE

DON'T

Anticipate what someone will say, and jump ahead in your mind... you can think faster than someone can speak, so use that time instead to review what's being said

Become detached when listening to detailed information or complex explanations – make frequent eye contact and ask questions to help you stay involved

Steer others off topic with questions or comments that aren't related to the conversation

DO

Listen with the genuine intent to understand what the speaker is communicating

Write down key points (if possible) or make a mental note of questions to ask when the speaker has finished sharing her thoughts, so you don't interrupt... the speaker may clarify the issue herself by the time she's done speaking

Focus on the message rather than the delivery or choice of words... the latter can distract you from the value of what's being said

To eliminate any misunderstandings, check yourself by rephrasing what you heard ("So you're saying...")

Ask relevant, open-ended questions to clarify and learn more ("What do you mean by that?" or "When you say...")

# Improve Your Listening Skills with Specific Tips for

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LEADERS & MANAGERS

TEAM MEMBERS & EMPLOYEES

PARENTS

STUDENTS

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Perception  
is reality –  
if people  
get the  
sense that  
they're  
not being  
heard,  
then  
they're  
not being  
heard.

LEADERS & MANAGERS

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

Close your email and instant messaging windows, switch your cell phone to silent, send your phone calls to voice mail and close the door, if necessary

Set aside specific hours to be available to your employees

Maintain a more relaxed open-door policy

Consider reserving a conference room for serious discussions

WRITE DOWN KEY POINTS

Jot down or make a mental note of key words, ideas and questions to ask later to minimize interruptions while someone is speaking

Note key points so you can have a point of reference later (if follow-up is needed)

UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE

Rephrase what you've heard to be sure you understand

Ask open-ended questions that encourage detailed answers... and wait a few seconds after the answer to encourage the speaker to say more

Double-check important facts and confirm appropriate follow-through

Listen with an open and unbiased attitude, and refrain from going on the defensive... make sure you thoroughly understand the situation before taking a position

GIVE YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION

Stop what you're doing and focus completely on the employee... maintain eye contact and acknowledge key points

Postpone a conversation if you have a looming deadline or scheduling conflict

A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something.

TEAM MEMBERS & EMPLOYEES

GIVE YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION

Set aside whatever you're doing and close off all potential distractions to focus completely on the speaker

Listen to the message rather than waiting for your turn to speak, or rehearsing your response

Maintain eye contact and face the speaker

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE HEARING

Write down or make a mental note of key points and any issues that are confusing... ask for clarification when the speaker is done, if necessary

Make sure you know exactly what issue or topic is being addressed

Before taking a position or going on the defensive, listen with an open and unbiased attitude to make sure you thoroughly understand the situation

CONFIRM APPROPRIATE FOLLOW-THROUGH

Double-check important facts, such as appointment times, to make sure you have the correct information

Verify your understanding of the next step – whether it's talking to another coworker, starting research on a new project, etc.

If you can't give an immediate answer, tell your manager or coworker when he can expect one

WILSON MIZNER (1876-1933)  
PLAYWRIGHT & ENTREPRENEUR

# Constantly talking isn't necessarily communi- cating.

JIM CARREY (1962- )  
CANADIAN-AMERICAN ACTOR  
AS JOEL BARISH IN  
*ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE  
SPOTLESS MIND* (2004)

## PARENTS

### ASK QUESTIONS TO UNDERSTAND

Rephrase what you've heard in your child's words to show you understand... using his words also strengthens his confidence in his verbal skills

Rephrase again in your own words and ask questions... your wider vocabulary will allow your child to express herself in a new way and deepen her understanding of words and thoughts

After your child has answered a question, wait just a few seconds to see if he'll say more

### GIVE YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION

When you need to have a more serious discussion, choose a specific time and find a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted

Eliminate outside distractions like television, the Internet or phone calls

### DEMONSTRATE GOOD LISTENING SKILLS

Look your child in the eye when he's talking to you... consider squatting or sitting so you're eye level with him and not towering over him

Pay attention to her message and don't interrupt or correct any improper grammar until she's done speaking

Listen with body language – smile and nod your head, change your facial expressions and acknowledge key points with a brief comment

### KNOW WHEN TO END THE CONVERSATION

Watch for signs that your child is done with the conversation, such as staring into space, asking you to repeat yourself several times or giving silly answers... once you recognize this, everyone's time is likely better invested elsewhere

The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.

MARK TWAIN (1835-1910)  
AMERICAN WRITER & HUMORIST

STUDENTS

BE READY TO LISTEN

Before class, read the information your teacher will discuss so you have a basic understanding of the topic and so you can identify any new information that's not available in your text book

To keep focused, sit where you are least likely to be distracted, if possible, and where you can make periodic eye contact with your teacher

LISTEN FOR THE BIGGER IDEAS

Listen for ideas that may challenge what you already know about a subject – exploring a new idea can give you a different perspective on the subject and provide a better understanding

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE HEARING

Think about what's been said and try to rephrase it in your own words... if you can't, then ask questions until you can

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask questions... nobody will ask questions for you and it's your responsibility to make sure you understand the information

EVALUATE THE INFORMATION

Determine what's important and what's not, and take notes on what you'll need to know later

Expand upon what your teacher says and make note of your own observations and conclusions based on what you already know about the subject

One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears - by listening to them.

### SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

#### CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST

Keep an open mind and avoid judgments... if your partner feels accepted and respected he or she will likely open up more

Genuinely want to listen and understand the other person's point of view

Show respect by allowing your partner to fully finish his or her thought without interrupting

Avoid bringing up past grievances and concentrate solely on the topic at hand

#### KNOW THE EXPECTED RESOLUTION

Be receptive to your partner's needs... he or she may simply want you to listen rather than solve the problem

Ask what resolution your partner expects from the conversation

Minimize giving advice unless your partner asks for it

DEAN RUSK (1909-1994)  
FORMER U.S. SECRETARY  
OF STATE

#### MAKE LISTENING A PRIORITY

Let go of other agendas so you can be fully involved in the conversation

Postpone a conversation if children or other outside forces distract you

Address situations as they arise instead of postponing them and letting feelings simmer

# Listening Toolkit

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LISTENING CHALLENGE

DO YOU INTERRUPT?

EXIT STATEMENTS

LISTENING SURVEY

REMINDERS & QUOTES

## THE SIMPLEST APPROACH TO BECOMING A BETTER LISTENER

Focus first on giving others your complete attention. Once you feel confident you've improved, begin becoming more consistent in adding a small gap of silence between what's said by someone else and your response. Finally, work more to minimize interruptions.

GIVE COMPLETE ATTENTION	ADD A GAP OF SILENCE	MINIMIZE INTERRUPTIONS
<p>Maintain eye contact and face the speaker</p> <p>Acknowledge key points with a nod, smile or brief comment ("I see," "I understand," "right," etc.)</p> <p>Dismiss distractions and acknowledge phones, email, instant messengers and other people following the current interaction</p> <p>Confirm understanding by rephrasing pertinent discussion issues</p>	<p>Add a small gap of silence between what the speaker says and your response - just an extra beat or two... this will help you minimize any tendency to interrupt and may encourage others to open up and share more (giving you the opportunity to learn more)</p>	<p>Wait for the person to pause fully before asking questions to clarify</p> <p>If you absolutely have to interrupt, a quick "I'm sorry, but [explain the crisis/problem/situation]..." is polite</p> <p>If you need to interrupt a conversation at work, say either "I'm sorry, I need this addressed..." (if you're the boss) or "I'm sorry, this interruption is unavoidable..." (if you're an employee)</p> <p>In any situation, make absolutely sure that what you have to say is worth the interruption</p>

## DO YOU INTERRUPT?

You might be an interrupter if you say...

“I don’t mean to interrupt but...”  
or “Sorry to interrupt...”

“That reminds me...”

“Excuse me...”

“Oh, hey, real quick...”

“Real quick...”

“Oh yeah...”

“Oh hey...”

“You know what...”

“Well, that’s not what I heard...”

“Wait...”

“That doesn’t sound right...”

“You know...”

“So you’re telling me...”

Exit statements that will politely help you out of an unfocused conversation and invest your time elsewhere...

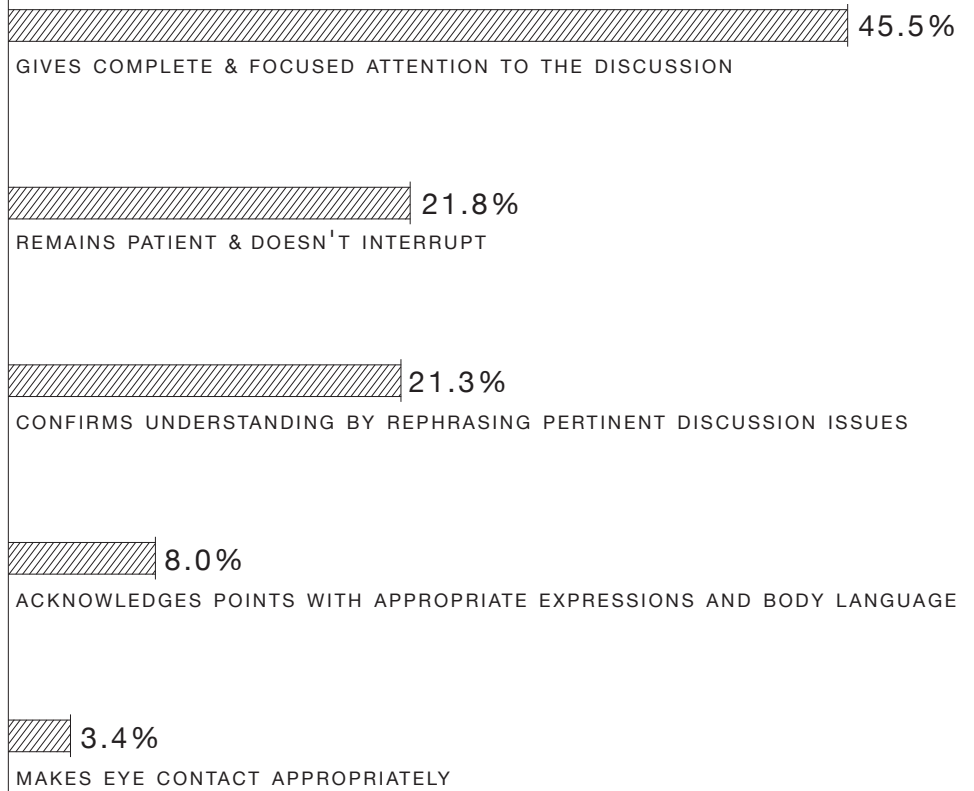
## SAMPLE EXIT STATEMENTS

“Things seem to have gotten busy... should we continue this later?”

“Why don’t we brainstorm some more on our own and discuss this in a while?”

“Well, so far this sounds exciting [complicated, great, etc.]... I’ll let you get back to [whatever the person was doing prior to talking with you] and I’ll touch base with you again shortly.”

In a May, 2007 survey of over 2,000 listeners\*, we asked respondents to choose the most important characteristic in a good listener



\*2,107 RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED TO CHOOSE FROM THE FIVE POSSIBILITIES ABOVE

**LISTEN ('LI-S&N) VERB**

1 : to pay attention to sound 2 : to hear something with thoughtful attention : give consideration 3 : to be alert to catch an expected sound

MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY

REMINDERS

It takes a speaker and a listener to have a conversation, so when it's your turn to speak, speak effectively to help your listener. Use as few words as necessary to get your point across.

Factor in personality differences. Just because someone isn't looking at you (or is giving one-word answers, or not asking questions, etc.) doesn't necessarily mean he's not listening. He could be shy, or have trouble expressing himself.

'Listen' and 'silent' have the exact same letters. Coincidence?

You want your eye contact to be steady, but not awkward. Avoid shifty, quick eye movements or lingering stares by maintaining a gaze long enough to notice the other person's eye color before looking away.

Take into account regional speech, dialect and cultural differences. For example, the pace or speed at which someone speaks may differ by regions in a country, and in some Asian cultures children are taught to avoid direct eye contact with authority figures.

Perception is reality – if people get the sense that they're not being heard, then they're not being heard.

QUOTATIONS

If you want to be listened to, you should put in time listening.  
MARGE PIERCY (1936- ), AMERICAN POET & NOVELIST

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JAMES 1:19

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