



Subject: Business Communication

Chapter: Listening skills

Category:

- What is listening?

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. It is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood. Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. *“Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken”*. It is not just about being quiet while someone else is speaking. Listening is with the mind and hearing is with the senses.

It is a combination of hearing what another person says and psychological involvement with the person who is talking. Listening is a skill of Language. It requires a desire to understand another human being, an attitude of respect and acceptance, and a willingness to open one's mind to try and see things from another's point of view. It requires high level of concentration and energy. It demands that we set aside our own thoughts and agendas, put ourselves in another's shoes and try to see the world through that person's eyes.

Listening comprises of some key components, they are:

- discriminating between sounds
- recognizing words and understanding their meaning
- identifying grammatical groupings of words
- identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning
- connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues
- using background knowledge to predict and to confirm meaning and
- recalling important words and ideas

One of the most common mistakes people make is confusing hearing and listening. Hearing is merely noting that someone is speaking. Listening, however, is making sense of what is heard and requires the individual to constantly pay attention, interpret, and remember what is heard. Hearing is passive; listening is active. The passive listener is much like a tape recorder. If the speaker is providing a clear message, the listener will probably get most of what is said. For effective communication skill, this is not enough. They must be active listeners. Active listening requires the listener to hear the words and identify the feelings associated with the words. People should be able to understand the speaker from his or her point of view. There are four essential requirements for active listening:

- Intensity
- Empathy
- Acceptance
- Willingness to take responsibility for completeness

- **Process of Listening**

The process of listening occur in five stages. They are receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and feedback.

RECEIVING – It is referred to the response caused by sound waves stimulating the sensory receptors of the ear; it is a physical response; hearing is perception of sound waves; you must hear to listen, but you need not listen to hear (perception necessary for listening depends on attention). Brain screens stimuli and permits only a select few to come into focus- these selective perception is known as attention, an important requirement for effective listening.

UNDERSTANDING- This step helps to understand symbols we have seen and heard, we must analyse the meaning of the stimuli we have perceived; symbolic stimuli are not only words but also sounds like applause and sights like blue uniform that have symbolic meanings as well; the meanings attached to these symbols are a function of our past associations and of the context in which the symbols occur. For a successful interpersonal communication, the listener must understand the intended meaning and the context assumed by the sender.

REMEMBERING- Remembering is important listening process because it means that an individual has not only received and interpreted a message but has also added it to the mind's storage bank. In listening our attention is selective, so too is our memory- what is remembered may be quite different from what was originally seen or heard. Remembering begins with listening; if you can't remember something that was said, you might not have been listening effectively.

EVALUATING- Only active listeners participate at this stage in listening. At this point the active listener weighs evidence, sorts fact from opinion, and determines the presence or absence of bias or prejudice in a message; the effective listener makes sure that he or she doesn't begin this activity too soon; beginning this stage of the process before a message is completed requires that we no longer hear and attend to the incoming message and as a result, the listening process ceases.

FEEDBACK- This stage requires that the receiver complete the process through verbal and/or nonverbal feedback; because the speaker has no other way to determine if a message has been received, this stage becomes the only overt means by which the sender may determine the degree of success in transmitting the message.

- **Importance of Listening**

Good listening skills make workers more productive. The ability to listen carefully will allow a person to:

- Understand assignments in a better way and find what is expected from him.
- build rapport with co-workers, bosses, and clients;
- show support and respect to other's view point;
- help us to learn, adapt and understand better;
- work better in a team-based environment;
- resolve problems with customers, co-workers, and bosses;
- answer questions;
- find underlying meanings in what others say;
- helps us to empathize with the situation;
- avoids communication errors

- **Basic types of listening**

Types of listening	Meaning
Active	Listening in a way that demonstrates interest and encourages continued speaking.
Selective	Listening only the selective portion based on our liking. Listening through the filter of personal bias i.e. the person hears only what they want to listen.
Empathetic	Seeking to understand what the other person is feeling. Demonstrating this is empathy.
Ignoring	Not listening to other person. This form of listening is quite insulting to the speaker as he/she may understand the lack of interest of the listener.
Reflective	Listening, then reflecting back to the other person what they have said.
Pretence	Pretending to listen but actually spending more time thinking.

Intuitive	Intuitive listening means the ability to read between the lines, to pick up on the unspoken clues that hint at a larger story behind the words.
Evaluating	Listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.

- **Barriers to effective listening**

Listening is not easy and there are a number of obstacles that stand in the way of effective listening, both within outside the workplace. These barriers may be categorized as follows.

PHYSIOLOGICAL BARRIERS: - some people may have genuine hearing problems or deficiencies that prevent them from listening properly. It can be treated. Some people may have problem in processing information or retaining information in the memory.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS: - These referred to distraction in the environment such as the sound of an air conditioner, cigarette smoke, or an overheated room. It can interfere the Listening process. They could also be in the form of information overload. For example, if you are in meeting with your manager and the phone rings and your mobile beeps at the same time to let u know that you have the message. It is very hard to listen carefully to what is being said.

ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS: - pre occupation with personal or work related problems can make it difficult to focus one's attention completely on what speaker is saying, even what is being said is of very importance. Another common attitudinal barrier is egocentrism, or the belief that the person have more knowledgeable than the speaker, or that there is nothing new to learn from the speaker's ideas. People with this kind of close minded attitude are very poor listeners.

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS: - The success of communication depend on the both the sender and receiver. It is wrong to assume that communication is the sole responsibility of the sender or the speaker and that listeners have no role to play. Such an assumption can be big barrier to listening. For example, a brilliant speech or presentation, however well delivered, is wasted if the receiver is not listening at the other end. Listeners have as much responsibility as speakers to make the communication successful. The process should be made successful by paying attention seeking clarifications and giving feedback.

CULTURAL BARRIERS: - Accents can be barriers to listening, since they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. The problem of different accents arises not only between cultures, but also within a culture. For example, in a country like India where there is enormous cultural diversity, accents may differ even between regions states.

GENDER BARRIERS: - Communication research has shown that gender can be barrier to listening. Studies have revealed that men and women listen very differently and for different purposes. Women are more likely to listen for the emotion behind a speaker's words, when men listen more for the facts and the content.

LACK OF TRAINING: - Listening is not an inborn skill. People are not born good listeners. It is developed through practice and training. Lack of training in listening skills is an important barrier.

BAD LISTENING HABITS: - Most people are very average listeners who have developed poor listening habits that are hard to say and that act as barriers to listening. For example, some people have the habits of "faking" attention, or trying to look like a listeners, in order to impress the speaker and to assure him that they are paying attention. Others may tend to listen to each and every fact and, as a result, miss out the main point.

Poor listeners may demonstrate these behaviors:

- knowing the answer
- trying to be helpful
- trying to influence or impress
- making assumptions
- only hearing what you want to hear
- daydreaming
- being in a hurry
- looking for points to argue with
- feeling nervous or vulnerable

Common listening issues:

- Tuning in and out
- The glazed look
- Mentee centred
- Becoming heated

- Giving space
- Interrupting the speaker.
- Completing the speakers sentences in advance.
- Habit of topping another person's story with your own is demeaning and relegates the speaker's story to something less important.
- Dominating Conversations – A person who dominates conversations probably commits all of the above mistakes and is not listening at all.

- **How to listen effectively?**

Here are some of the tips which can help the person to improve his Listening skill:

- Face the speaker. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
- Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
- Minimize external distractions. Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.
- Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really,” “Interesting,” as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”
- Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
- Minimize internal distractions. If your own thoughts keep horning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.
- Keep an open mind. Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.
- Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation. Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.
- Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish to defend yourself. The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won’t feel the need to repeat it, and you’ll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.
- Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won’t interrupt their train of thought.

After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying..."

- Focus on non-verbal cues
- Try to gather information about the topic to develop interest and familiarity

- **Benefits of effective listening**

Learning the skill of effective listening benefits personal growth and development in the following ways:

Effective Communication – Clear and concise transmission of information is an important component of effective human interaction. Though the onus is often placed on presenting clear and concise written or spoken directions, the listener also bears a responsibility to hear and understand messages.

Fewer Misunderstandings – Regardless of the clarity of written or spoken messages, the effective listener can prevent misunderstandings and salvage what otherwise might be a miscommunication by practicing active listening skills.

Improved Relationships – Relationships are damaged by misunderstandings that can lead to unsatisfactory business transactions as well as hurt feelings in personal relationships. Excellent listening practices tell others that they are important, special, and what they have to say is valued. That is very attractive and contributes to strong relationships.

Personal Growth – A person learns and grows by listening and understanding other viewpoints, differing ideas, and exploring conflicting viewpoints. Learning the skill of active and effective listening not only adds a tool to the personal development portfolio, but equips you to continue growing with tools for exploring new ideas.