Mindful Listening

Idea In Short

Speaking and listening are important skills of effective communication that consultants should master. Effective communication allows the sender, the message and the receiver to cogently exchange ideas. Listening is an act of making sense out of what a person hears. Effective listening requires paying attention, interpreting and remembering what is communicated. There is a distinct difference between hearing and listening. The academic definition of hearing is:

> the act of receiving sound or information by the ear

While listening is defined as:

> the act of paying attention to sound, hearing something with thoughtful attention, or paying attention to someone or something in order to hear and understand what is being said, sung, or played

What Is passive listening?

Unlike active listening, passive listening does not require any special effort other than hearing what is being said. Typically, a passive listener does not make appropriate physical gestures, such as facial expressions or eye contacts with the speaker. He / she does not engage in any other action that indicates attention. The receiver doesn't provide feedback or asks questions; he / she may or may not understand what is being communicated. Instead, the listener has a negative attitude which they demonstrate through selective and ignoring attitude. He / she pays attention to a few areas and phrases. Passive listener hides or denies any form of reasonable engagement, thus avoiding debates or giving options. Examples of passive listening include, communicating on the phone while checking social

media, texting your friend during a lecture or listening to your spouse complain about their day at work while watching news on TV.

What Is Active Listening?

Active listening requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand the message, respond thoughtfully and remember what is being said. It involves the listener observing the speaker's behavior and body language. Having the ability to interpret a person's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message. In other words, active listening requires two-way communication and connection between the speaker and the listener. The listener isn't just going to sit and remain silent; the active listener has a job to do in offering a response to the speaker. The listener has a positive attitude which he / she demonstrates through body language, eye contact and reception. Examples of situations where active listening is crucial include group discussions, meetings, job and media interviews, etc. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_dAkDsBQyk

What is mindful listening?

The most important aspect of mindful listening is the focus on listening with complete attention. When you are really listening to someone, you are hearing that person. However, when you are hearing something or someone, you are not always listening. Listening requires 100% focus on the person that is speaking. It's being with them in what they are saying, absorbing their words and emotions through all of your senses. Listening is hearing with every part of you. Think of a time when you spoke with a friend, spouse or client about an important scenario. Odds are that when the conversation was over, you felt lighter and relaxed. This is likely because they were with you fully. True listening is not as easy as it sounds.

Why don't we listen?

True listening is a lot of work; it requires 100% of our attention (mental energy) and we are trained to multi-task. It's tough to focus on just one thing at a time. In addition, life circumstances do not always support single-minded focus on one specific activity. Often, when we're in listening mode, we're also in to-do-list-mode. We always seem to be getting ready for the next task, while on a current task. This doesn't mean we aren't hearing what's being said. It just means we aren't fully present. When we're truly listening to someone, we

are holding space, so the person can express whatever thoughts and feelings they want to share. We are inviting that information into our space. We are holding it open for them to feel welcomed, comfortable, at peace and in loving company. For some consultants, this is natural and effortless. For others, it's a muscle that will need to be worked, practiced, and improved.

Practice mindful listening

Meditation is a practice that trains the mind to focus. Meditation not only trains the mind, but also the body and associated emotions. It trains us to be still and present with whatever comes up. Meditation require immense practice. Just like in meditation, be in the moment with your counterpart. Don't just receive the information, but fully listen to them. Invite whatever they say to further the conversation. Try to feel what they're feeling, relate, and understand. This is the practice of true listening. Turn off your cell phone ringer, email notifications and TV. Try to keep your mind focused on the person talking. When you notice your mind wandering, bring it back to the conversation.

Four habits that derail listening

In the podcast - Four Habits That Derail Listening, with Oscar Trimboli, the speaker details the four habits that tend to derail our listening. The speaker recommends that we also notice feelings instead of just words — not just WHAT they are saying, but also HOW people are saying things.

Dramatic Listener

They get engrossed in the emotion and want to become an actor in it. Dramatic listeners tend to get caught up in the problem so much so that they don't hear the idea or the solution. They may come away from an interaction feeling like they've really connected when in fact, they haven't.

Interrupting Listener

We notice these people the most. They are coming from a place of concern and tend to listen to fix and solve the problem. They finish sentences wrongly and many listen for places to jump in as much as they are listening for the words.

Lost Listener

These listeners tend to zone out and appear not present. Lost listeners may be focused on something else. Technology devices have the potential to distract them substantially.

Shrewd Listener

These listeners are solving the current problem and also the next problem. They may create problems in their own mind that aren't even what speaker said. They are smart enough not to interrupt, and often appear very engaged, but are not necessarily listening.

> Deep listeners are engaged in the process of not just connecting words, phrases and sentences, they are listening beyond the obvious. They connect the patterns, the common links in stories and ultimately, they are searching for meaning rather than understanding. Listening for what's said is like spending all your time looking at the sun and saying that because the sun is the most obvious and brightest part of the sky, it is the only star in the solar system. Listening for what's unsaid is about taking a broader perspective – it's about taking an explorer mindset to looking at the solar system and first noticing the sky, the clouds and the sun before we explore Mars, Jupiter and beyond.

Summary

We speak between 125 and 175 words per minute, yet we can listen to 400 words per minute. That means that no matter how fast our counterpart speaks, our mind can process three to four times more words. It's this gap that causes you to drift off and be distracted. Such techniques as active listening, paraphrasing, summarizing, verbal confirmation, and body mirroring are great places to start learning to listen – they are just the beginning rather than the end of the practice of listening.