

12 TOOLS FOR DEEP LISTENING

People love a good listener. The most popular salespeople, managers, coworkers, teachers, parents, and friends are the best listeners.

To listen well, begin from a clear intention. *Choose* to listen well. Then you can use the following twelve techniques to take your listening to deeper levels.

1. BE QUIET

Silence is more than staying quiet while someone is speaking. Allowing several seconds to pass before you begin to talk gives the speaker time to catch her breath and gather her thoughts. If the message being sent is complete, this short break gives you time to form your response and helps you avoid the biggest barrier to listening—listening with your answer running. If you make up a response before the person is finished, you might miss the end of the message, which is often the main point.

2. DISPLAY OPENNESS

You can display openness through your facial expression and body position. Uncross your arms and legs. Sit up straight. Face the other person and remove any physical barriers between you, such as a pile of books.

3. SEND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Let the speaker know periodically that you are still there. Words and nonverbal gestures of acknowledgment convey to the speaker that you are interested and that you are receiving her message. Examples are “Uh hum,” “OK,” “Yes,” and head nods. These acknowledgments do not imply your agreement. They just indicate that you are listening.

4. RELEASE DISTRACTIONS

Even when your intention is to listen, you might find your mind wandering. Thoughts about what *you* want to say or something you want to do later might claim your attention.

There’s a simple solution: notice your wandering mind without judgment. Then bring your attention back to the act of listening.

There are times when you might not want to listen. You might be distracted with your own concerns. Be honest. Don’t pretend to listen. You can say, “What you’re telling me is important, but I’m pressed for time right now. Can we set aside another time to talk about this?” Sometimes it’s OK not to listen.

5. SUSPEND JUDGMENTS

Listening and agreeing are two different activities. As listeners, our goal is to fully receive another person’s message. This does not mean that we’re obligated to agree with the message. Once you’re confident that you accurately understand a speaker’s point of view, you are free to agree or disagree with it. One key to effective listening is understanding *before* evaluating.

6. LOOK FOR REQUESTS AND INTENTIONS

An effective way to listen to complaints is to look for the request hidden in them. “This class is a waste of my time” can be heard as “Please tell me what I’ll gain if I participate actively in class.” “The instructor talks too fast” might be asking “What strategies can I use to take notes when the instructor covers material rapidly?”

We can even transform complaints into intentions. Take this complaint: “The parking lot by the dorms is so dark at night that I’m afraid to go to my car.” This complaint can lead to “I intend to talk to someone who can see that a light gets installed in the parking lot.”

Viewing complaints as requests and intentions gives us more choices. We can stop responding with defensiveness (“What does he know anyway?”), resignation (“It’s always been this way and always will be”), or indifference (“It’s not my job”). We can choose whether to grant the request or help people translate their complaint into an action plan.

7. ALLOW EMOTION

In the presence of full listening, some people will share things that they feel deeply about. They might cry, shake, or sob. If you feel uncomfortable when this happens, see if you can accept the discomfort for a little while longer. Emotional release can bring relief and trigger unexpected insights.

8. NOTICE NONVERBAL AND MUNDANE BEHAVIORS

You might point out that the speaker’s body language seems to be the exact opposite of her words. For example, “I noticed you said you are excited, but to me you look bored.”

Keep in mind that the same nonverbal behavior can have various meanings across cultures. Someone who looks bored might simply be listening in a different way.



9. FEED BACK MEANING

Summarize the essence of that person's message. "Let me see if I understood what you said ..." or "What I'm hearing you say is ..." Often, the other person will say, "No, that's not what I meant. What I said was ..."

There will be no doubt when you get it right. The sender will say, "Yeah, that's it," and either continue with another message or stop sending when she knows you understand.

When you feed back meaning, be concise. This is not a time to stop the other person by talking on and on about what you think you heard.

10. BE CAREFUL WITH QUESTIONS AND ADVICE

Questions are directive. They can take conversations in a new direction, which may not be where the speaker wants to go. Ask questions only to clarify the speaker's message. Later, when it's your turn to speak, you can introduce any topic that you want.

Also be cautious about advice. Unsolicited advice can be taken as condescending or even insulting. Skilled listeners recognize that people are different, and they do not assume that they know what's best for someone else.


11. ASK FOR MORE

Full listening with unconditional acceptance is a rare gift. Many people have never experienced it. They are used to being greeted with resistance, so they habitually stop short of saying what they truly think and feel. Help them shed this habit by routinely asking, "Is there anything more you want to say about that?" This sends the speaker a message that you truly value what she has to say.

12. STAY OPEN TO THE ADVENTURE OF LISTENING

Receiving what another person has to say is an act of courage. Listening fully—truly opening yourself to the way another person sees the world—means taking risks. Your opinions may be challenged. You may be less certain or less comfortable than you were before.

Along with the risks come rewards. Listening in an unguarded way can take your relationships to a new depth and level of honesty. This kind of listening can open up new possibilities for thinking, feeling, and behavior. And when you practice full listening, other people are more likely to listen when it's your turn to speak.

 **You're One Click Away . . .**
from more strategies for deep listening

7 steps to effective complaints

Sometimes relationship building involves making a complaint. Whining, blaming, pouting, screaming, and yelling insults usually don't get results. Here are some guidelines for complaining effectively.

Go to the source. Start with the person who is most directly involved with the problem.

Present the facts without blaming anyone. Your complaint will carry more weight if you document the facts. Keep track of names and dates. Note which actions were promised and which results actually occurred.

Go up the ladder to people with more responsibility. If you

don't get satisfaction at the first level, go to that person's direct supervisor. Requesting a supervisor's name will often get results. Write a letter to the company president.

Ask for compromises. When you find someone who is willing to solve your problem, get him to say exactly what he is going to do and when.

Use available support. There are dozens of groups, as well as government agencies, willing to get involved in resolving complaints. Contact consumer groups or the Better Business Bureau. Trade associations can sometimes help. Ask city council members, county

commissioners, state legislators, and senators and representatives. All of them want your vote, so they are usually eager to help.

Go to the Small-Claims Court. Small-claims court is relatively inexpensive, and you don't have to hire a lawyer. These courts can handle cases involving small amounts of money (usually up to a few thousand dollars). Legal-aid offices can sometimes answer questions.

Outsourcing. Assume that others are on your team. Many people are out there to help you. State what you intend to do and ask for their partnership.