

10 TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

1. Decide to listen.

Listening is a choice. So deciding to stop talking and start listening is an important first step.

2. Let go of your own personal agenda.

To truly hear someone, you need to let go of your own agenda, and prejudices. Focus your attention by clearing away all distractions and any preconceived notions, so that you can be fully present and create space in your mind for different views.

3. Be curious.

Effective listening requires you to be curious about how other people see the world. Seek to understand all you can, ask open questions and try to see the world through the other person's perceptual lens.

4. Listen with your eyes.

Maintain eye contact with the speaker and pay attention to all the visual clues. People will appreciate your attention and be better able to communicate with you. With practice, you will become more able to read the signs and understand the meaning of what is being communicated.

5. Listen for the whole message.

Make sure you hear and understand the whole message before you respond. A common bad habit is to only hear what you expect to hear, and then begin rehearsing your response, ready to pitch in as soon as the dialog has stopped. (Or worse still, interrupting with a response to what you think you are likely to hear.)

6. Be patient.

Some people take longer to find the right words, to make a point or clarify an issue. Leave time for them to think and complete their message. Wait, and then wait some more.

7. Listen with respect.

Respecting the right to differ is a key concept that is especially important when you are listening. Differences may lie in the opinions being expressed, or in the communication style that is being used. Remember that even when you are not communicating verbally, your own non-verbal cues speak for you. Listen to understand, not to judge.



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8. Feel empathy.

This is particularly important when people communicate something personal or painful. Empathy is more than feeling sorry for someone. Empathy requires you to first understand and feel others' emotions and feelings so that you can then acknowledge the message and share your new understanding.

9. Manage your own emotions and reactions.

If what others are saying creates an emotional response in you, be attentive to listen for the intent and full meaning of their words. Don't allow others to blow wind into your sails. Remember you have control of your reactions. You cannot stop the wind, but you can choose to let it spill off your sails! Maintaining your calm, even when you feel like your 'buttons' are being pushed, is a powerful skill that will help you achieve your goals in all aspects of your life. Getting defensive and angry makes it difficult to impossible to listen.

10. Test for understanding.

Periodically summarize what you have heard to test your understanding. Also, by asking questions to clarify your understanding, you will draw out a clearer picture of what is being said.

