

Effective Listening the Key to Resolving Conflict

Third in a series

It is often said that since human beings have two ears and just one mouth, we should be listening twice as much as we are talking. Yet we see “speaking” courses offered all the time, but see little or no training offered in “listening”. Many conflicts can be avoided or corrected by learning to listen to what each other has to say.

A well known cartoon once showed the little girl addressing her preoccupied father with, “Daddy, you have to listen to me with your eyes as well as your ears.” Do you have the skills to listen with your face and your body? See the check list here for some points to consider.

Do you exhibit these characteristics?

1. You tend to “wool gather” or let your mind wander while someone else is talking, particularly a slow speaker.
2. If you perceive the subject as “dry” you tend to tune out.
3. You are easily distracted while someone is speaking.
4. You take intensive notes, but the more notes you take the less you actually comprehend what is being said.
5. You are over stimulated and tend to seek and enter into arguments.
6. You are inexperienced in listening to difficult material. In your optional listening habits (radio, television etc.) you seek out light or recreational material.
7. You judge the way someone is speaking, not what he or she is saying.
8. You just listen for facts and miss the ideas being expressed.
9. You interrupt the flow of the speaker’s message to insert your own comments and thoughts.



3. Relate even difficult or dry material to your own life so you can find value in it.
4. Fight distractions –see past the speaker’s bad communication habits to what the important information is.
5. Don’t judge prematurely. Wait until all the evidence is shared.
6. Exercise your mind by listening to “heavier” materials – on radio, television or books-on-tape.
7. Act like a good listener – listen with your face and your expression.
8. Hold eye contact with the speaker – show you are in an “active” body state.
9. You should not be “at rest” while you are listening to someone. It is not a passive state.

After listening well to someone, you should feel tired.

10. Listen for the central ideas not just the facts being presented.
11. And, finally, allow silence. When you are truly engaged in a discussion with someone, it is perfectly appropriate to take time to reflect – time when both of you are silent, thinking about each other’s points of view.

To be an effective listener, try these techniques.

1. Mentally summarize what someone is saying to you so that you can repeat it back to him. This guarantees that you’ve correctly heard, and assures him that you were listening.
2. Listen between the lines to the speaker’s tone of voice.