

Listening

Self-Coaching Guide

How to improve verbal communication

Improving our verbal communication makes us more creative, innovative, and efficient. It also enhances our wellbeing. Listening to others better is a vital part of good communication. Good listening isn't taught or modelled very often, so it's easy not to realise how poor we are at it. Sadly, the regular bombardment of messages we receive via our devices makes true listening more challenging.

How can I improve my listening skills?

There are some common types of behaviour we can adopt when listening. Awareness of these behaviour types is half the battle to improving our listening skills. We can notice when we've adopted a type and return our focus on to the other person. Here are some types we often adopt when listening:

Juggler: We mentally juggle our thoughts as we try to listen, and get distracted with our own agenda.

Hurry-Upper: We are impatient and want to hurry people on to get to the point of what they are saying.

Rehearser: We rehearse what we are going to say next, waiting to jump in with our own story.

Fixer: We try to fix someone's problem, and start thinking about possible solutions for the person.

Interrupter: We look for opportunities to interrupt the person with our own agenda, story or solution.

Pretender: We go into pretend-mode, and try to look as if we are interested when really we're not.

And as much as we try to hide the above types of listening, we will inevitably give off non-verbal cues that will be picked up by the person we are listening to. And what will they feel when this happens? Not really listened to at all. The loss of our attention will make them feel unimportant to us. Most of the time, people tell us something in order simply to be heard, not to have their problems solved. Note that interrupting others can be received as a brutal verbal assault, leaving a person feeling wounded.

Three Levels of Listening

Quality listening is important. So, let's consider three levels at which we can 'tune in' to other people:

- 1) **Conversational listening**, which oils the wheels of a relationship but may not go down too deep.
- 2) **Active listening**, when we listen specifically to get information or to tune in more intentionally. Active listening requires that we tune out other 'noises' and distractions and focus harder, more attentively.
- 3) **Deep listening**, when we shut out everything else and give a person our total focused attention. It's as if there's no one but you and that person in the whole world. And you don't just listen actively, you listen beyond words – noticing tone, facial expressions, body language, etc. This deepest form of listening takes great effort and skill, so it's often only used when appropriate, for short periods of time.

Reference:

This guide is based on an extract from *Soulfulness: Deepening the Mindful Life* by Brian Draper (2016).

*"When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know.
But if you listen, you may learn something new."* Dalai Lama

More Information

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