

Decide You Want to Listen

By Dianna Booher

Hearing involves the physical—the ear. Listening involves the psyche—our soul (will and emotions). Hearing is mechanical: We hear traffic, yelling, music from the radio. Listening is intentional: We listen to emotion behind words, draw conclusions, ask questions, demonstrate understanding.

Listening makes us better communicators because it's two-way rather than one-directional communication. Listening makes us better managers, employees, friends, and spouses for several reasons:

- Listening keeps us informed. If you only do "output" of information, after a while, your "tank" is empty. What you "know" is outdated. "How it is" quickly becomes "how it was." That is, you become stale and stagnant.
- We read the emotions and interpret more correctly what the spoken words mean.
- We listen to verify that our conclusions are the correct ones.
- Listening makes the other person feel valued.
- Listening demonstrates caring and concern for the other person. If we didn't care, we wouldn't take the time good listening requires.

You can improve your listening skills in several ways:

Make up your mind that you INTEND to listen. Pay attention. "Tune in actively, not passively."

Listen with a clean slate. Listening means standing on level ground, listening as though you were a doctor gathering new symptoms from a patient or a pilot in touch with the control tower during a storm.

Clean your listening filter. (Consider the digitized voice on the rental car lot: "Please leave your keys in the car" said over and over.) The trick is in identifying the filters to clean. Executives may filter any advice by an external consultant. A boss may filter any suggestion from Matt. Some filters save time. Others prevent you from hearing opportunity and gaining understanding.

Avoid "listening" as a retreat. Those who are afraid to speak their mind on an issue, those who don't want to risk being wrong, those who don't want to get involved--those

people often pretend their listening, but are hiding behind silence. People who listen make a connection by asking questions, verifying feelings, restating your key point.

Listen for what's NOT said. That's often the louder message.

We begin learning/unlearning listening skills in childhood when a parent or teacher teaches bad listening, such as the comments to a child:

- "Just ignore that remark--he didn't really mean it."
- "Ignore that bully and he'll leave you alone."
- "Don't pay any attention to him--pretend you didn't hear him."
- "She's just angry because she's jealous. Just let it go by."

Everybody wants to talk, few want to think, and nobody wants to listen.

#

432 words

***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.