



## IMPROVING OUR LISTENING SKILLS

### **I. Why listen?**

Listening is a courtesy.

Listening gives others a needed boost.

Listening is what gives meaning to speaking. Listening gives us a background for decision-making. Listening can change knowledge into wisdom.

### **II. Presenting the problem:**

Listening is a skill, like speaking, reading and writing.

How much time did we spend in school learning each of these skills? We were told to listen, but were we taught how to listen?

We read 1200 words per minute, but most people speak at the rate of 125 to 150 words per minute; and one can listen at a speed of 400 to 750 words in that time.

What does our brain do when it listens to someone talking? It tunes in and out. If the "bout" is a split second, we do not lose any words, but quite often, we are distracted too long and we miss the completion of an idea. Having lost the "thread" makes it harder to follow and our attention degenerates.

### **III. Exploring the problem:**

"I just wasn't interested in the subject."

"I do not agree with the speaker."

"I was thinking of what I was going to say."

"I listen only to what I want to hear."

Being a patient listener demands much self-discipline.

### **IV. Dealing with the problem:**

Avoid distractions.

Become engrossed in the subject.

Don't tune out what you don't like to hear.

Listen to the speaker's intent rather than trying to dissect every word.

Listen to what is not said.

Keep an open mind.

Listen objectively - sometimes we have to deal with a speaker whose personality we do not like.

### **V. Listening to non-verbal communication:**

Behavior that accompanies our words (facial expressions, gestures, body positions, actions, mood and timing) can speak volumes.

#### **VI. Non-verbal feedback** (from the listener):

The more common non-verbal clues are provided by what is not said: by silence, body movements, tension, smiling and yawning.

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#### **VII. Listening can be counseling:**

Sometimes people must talk to sort things out and all that is expected of the listener is that she listen.

#### **VIII. To be a good listener you must ACT like a good listener:**

Maintain good eye contact; focus all attention on the one talking.

Be patient and relaxed; look as if you are enjoying listening.

Give encouragement to go on talking by asking questions.

Try not to anticipate what the other person will say.

Be mindful of your own prejudices so they do not unduly influence your listening. Pay careful attention to what is said without planning rebuttals.

Try not to understand things too soon; do not permit yourself to get too far ahead of the speaker.

Give the speaker the opportunity to learn what you think you have heard her say.

Repeat what has been said, putting it into your own words. "Is this what you mean?" or

"Do I understand this correctly?"

#### **IX. A checklist for improved listening:**

- Do I understand that I not only have the right to influence others but they also have the right to influence me?

- Do I know my biases and prejudices so that they do not unduly filter out certain messages? - Do I understand that people "speak" through a myriad of non—verbal ways and that I must hear this communication too?

- Do I understand that when a person feels that she is being understood, she tends to be less aggressive and less defensive?

- Do I understand that being a good listener does not mean I must believe what I am hearing or subscribe to the values of the speaker?

- Do I understand that I am learning little when I am talking?

- Do I consider the person involved as well as the situation?

- Do I listen for what is not being said?

#### **X. Conclusion:**

Listening requires a high degree of attention and keen perception. It requires being critical, questioning the logic as well as the reliability of what we hear. It makes us aware of new ideas and new situations. It reminds us of the needs, problems, values and contributions of others. We control how much others will tell us by what we do. If we invest our time and energy in listening, it is possible to hear up to 75% more accurately than before.

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from Act Like a Listener

and Creative Listening

Member Development Committee