

THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

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Anantation: In this article, I'm going to break down exactly what it means to actively listen and how you can practice this skill in the workplace, at home, with friends — pretty much everywhere! To be a great leader, you must be a great listener. According to Richard Branson, this is crucial because “nobody learned anything by hearing themselves speak.” Since active listening is a core communication skill, it's also essential for effective leadership. Active listening can make a tremendous difference in your relationships with friends, family members, coworkers, anyone really. Carl Rogers and Richard Farson defined the term “active listening” in 1957 in a paper of the same title. Rogers and Farson wrote: “Active listening is an important way to bring about changes in people. Despite the popular notion that listening is a passive approach, clinical and research evidence clearly shows that sensitive listening is a most effective agent for individual personality change and group development.”

Key words: listener, improvement, development, distraction, friends, family members, coworkers, anyone really, sound like you're saying, nonverbal communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, and constructive criticism...

Listening brings about changes in people's attitudes toward themselves and others; it also brings about changes in their basic values and personal philosophy. People who have been listened to in this new and special way become more emotionally mature, more open to their experiences, less defensive, more democratic, and less authoritarian. Challenges of active listening To become a better listener, you need to understand what is involved in effective communication and

develop the techniques that will help keep your own needs aside while focusing on those of another person. This can be difficult because of the way humans think. Our brains are naturally drawn towards distractions with any new information or idea presented to us. When you're talking to someone, your brain immediately pays attention to the words coming from their mouth, tone of their voice, and manner of speaking. This is where it gets tricky because instead of hearing one voice, you end up hearing two. The first one coming from the other person, and the second one in your own head. If we don't pay attention, we will listen to the voice coming from within, rather than the other person. Sitting down for a conversation is not always easy. We should strive not just to hear what people are saying but also pay close attention and stay aware of anything important while having an active discussion. This means staying aware which direction our focus wanders off, which can be difficult when distractions come into play!

Different types of listening

You've heard me mention hearing, listening, and active listening several times. What is the real difference between them?

Let's break down these the three types and understand how active listening can make you a more effective leader.



Hearing

We also know this type as “not listening.” Yes, we all habitually do this. It’s one of the worst habits because you are not actually listening to what your people have to say. You might be looking at the person and pretending to listen, or maybe nodding your head in agreement from time-to-time — but internally you are thinking about what’s going on with yourself. Another example would be half listening while someone talks because you’re busy checking your phone. I’m guilty of this. I used to check my phone every few minutes during conversations, thinking there might be an important message I’ll miss. The truth was, I was missing the most important message right in front of me. This shows that your thoughts and preoccupations matter more than anything else to you, which will make your people feel unheard or insignificant in some way.

Listening

Listening is an improvement from hearing. When you are not thinking about other things, such as looking at your phone or checking social media while someone speaks to you. You may have heard what they said, but you were never fully connected. I enjoy hearing new ideas. The challenge is that as soon as I hear it, I start processing it and lose attention to the other person. This will make people feel heard but never truly understood because there was no full engagement with their emotions behind those words.

Active listening

Active listening is key to being a more effective leader in this digital era. Leaders need empathy, awareness of other’s emotions and thoughts on topics discussed with them.

You are paying attention not only to what someone says but also to their body language and non-verbal clues about how they feel when talking about certain topics. It’s essential to develop your ability for leadership during these times, where technology has taken over so much of our lives.

Effective leaders don't just listen closely; they take time out from doing anything else (like working) to really hear everything their people verbalize without interruption.



How to engage in active listening

Active listening is an important skill for everyone! Yes, it's a skill. Learning how to actively listen with intention (so people feel understood) takes some time, but **PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT**. Here are 4 essential active listening techniques you can use to become a better listener and leader:

Pay attention — It is important to give the other person your undivided attention and acknowledge them. Look at their facial expressions, body language, and make eye contact as they are speaking. Don't allow the environment to distract you.

Hold back judgment — As an active listener and leader, be open to new ideas. Avoid interrupting the person speaking by arguing or trying to force your point right away. Allow the other person to finish each point before asking questions.

Reflect on what's being said — When you're the listener, your personal beliefs may influence what you hear. Don't make assumptions about what's being said. You can mirror what the other person is saying by paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions. For example: "Sound like you're saying that..." or "What do you mean when you say?"

Be authentic in your response — Listen to the speaker with an open mind, but do not agree or disagree until you understand what they are saying. Be candid in your responses so that you can give honest feedback with no bias towards either side of the discussion. Focusing on issues instead of the person allows you to have a more productive conversation between two people who may have very different points-of-views.

Especially the four types of listening

Here's how. There are four different types of listening:

1. Empathic listening, which is when you listen to understand. Think of listening when someone shares a personal story. In this type of listening, you're focused on the other person, instead of yourself.

2. Appreciative listening, which is when you listen to enjoy yourself. Think of listening to music, a motivational speaker, or attending a religious ceremony.

3. Comprehensive listening, which is when you listen to learn something new. This type of listening happens when you listen to a podcast, the news, or an educational lecture, like a class.

4. Critical listening, which is when you listen to form an opinion of what someone else said. This type of listening happens when you're debating with

CRITICAL LISTENING

- Can be practiced and improved
- Four suggested steps:
 - Examining
 - Comparing
 - Concluding
 - Acting



someone or when you're listening to a sales person.

Active listening—or listening to understand—falls under the category of empathic listening. This type of listening helps you build strong relationships, gain a deeper understanding of your friends and colleagues, and even deepens your own sense of empathy.

What is active listening?

Active listening is the practice of listening to understand what someone is saying. When you practice active listening, you're exclusively focused on what the other person is saying instead of planning what to say in response as you would during a debate or conversation. To confirm you understand, you then paraphrase what you heard back to the other person. Depending on the conversation, you can also ask a specific, open-ended question to dig deeper into the topic.

Active listening helps you have more meaningful and engaged conversations. When you're paying full attention to what the other person is saying—without planning what you want to say or interrupting their conversation—you develop more effective communication skills.

Active listeners:

- Ask open-ended questions to learn more.
- Paraphrase and summarize what the other person is saying to make sure you fully understand.
- Practice non-judgmental listening by setting aside their own [biases](#) or points of view.
- Demonstrate patience by focusing on the other person, instead of your own thoughts.
- Exhibit positive, [nonverbal communication](#) like eye contact and leaning in.
- Avoid distractions and multitasking.

The benefits of active listening

Active listening is one of the best ways to build your interpersonal relationships and establish closer connections, especially with team members. This soft skill is a key part of [conflict resolution](#), [problem solving](#), and [constructive criticism](#).

When you practice active listening you:

- Improve communication
- Boost collaboration
- Truly understand what the other person is saying
- Connect on a deeper level
- Demonstrate empathy
- Resolve conflict
- Build trust
- [Establish rapport](#)

Effective Steps for active listening



A person with strong listening skills will be able to communicate effectively with the other party, and will thus be in a better position to reach their goals.

Here are the 10 steps to active listening. Follow them and apply in your life.

Step 1: Give your complete attention to the speaker

An effective listening involves maintaining the appropriate posture and avoid distracting mannerisms; focus on what the speaker is saying. Maintain eye contact; nod and smile when appropriate.

Step 2: Understand before you want to be understood

Get to know the speaker better: “That’s a great idea, but can you elaborate on it?”

When you seek meaningful understanding, you will be understood better and the person speaking will provide more information that will add value to the conversation.

Step 3: Control your personal judgments

If you are able to remember some of the crucial points mentioned by the speaker at the end of the discussion, it indicates you are a good attentive listener.

Step 4: Don't interrupt the speaker until the point is being made

The communication flows smoothly only because of the involvement of the active listener.

Make sure to stay silent while the speaker making his mind-altering perspectives. Then interrupt only when you are not sure of a particular point that has been made.

Step 5: Ask questions to avoid the conflicts

Keeping active listening is also possible by asking questions. Active listeners will always inquire about something from the speaker.

As such, on the one hand, you need to question the speaker to demonstrate that you are actively listening to what they are saying, on the other you can also be questioned by the speaker about what they are discussing to determine whether you are actively listening to them or not.

Step 6: Make sure you are receiving the exact message

Keep your attention still, and ask the right questions such as, "This is what you mean? Did I receive your perspective as you are intended to deliver?"

Step 7: Remember the details for future reference

If you are able to remember some of the crucial points mentioned by the speaker at the end of the discussion, it indicates you are a good attentive listener.

Step 8: Evaluate the information you gathered before reflecting

Just actively listening is not the job of a listener. A good listener always evaluate the information and relates the topic by making multiple analyses then reflect back to sync with the story.

Step 9: Take time to prepare yourself for responding

Don't just ask unnecessary questions for the sake of asking. No need to prove the speaker that you are caring and actively listening. Your actions speak more than your words. So, just listen with undivided attention. Take time to prepare yourself for responding at the right moment.

Step 10: Share your genuine feedback

Interpersonal skills are way beyond just listening or speaking. In order to come to a mutual conclusion.

Active listening exercises

Exercise on summarizing the conversation:

You should attend every conversation with a summary at least for 5 to 7 days. The goal is to follow up consistently on decisions that are reached during conversations with summarizing.

Group activity exploring specific topics: a game and an exercise

- Be open-minded: disengage your biases, search for things to agree with as well as things to challenge.
- Learn by being curious: rather than trying to “fix” anything, try to find out more.
- Listen without interrupting the speaker: write down your questions or leave them until later.
- Pay attention to patterns and things you do not hear being said.
- Understand what you intend to learn when you listen: What do you intend to do with the information you receive?

One rule is that each person must have a chance to speak once before anyone else is allowed to speak again.

The second rule is for someone to answer any question they ask before anyone else may reply.

Make sure the rules are followed by identifying a captain.



Conclusion

Active listening can be challenging, but it's worth the effort. It takes determination and concentration to truly understand what another person is saying. Active listening is one of the most important social skills you can have. If active listening seems like an overwhelming task, don't worry! Just keep practicing and it will become easier for you over time. "I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening."

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