

MANAGEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

Chapter 3

HOW TO LISTEN

- 3.1 Listening Assessment
- 3.2 Five Ways to Be a Better Listener
- 3.3 Follow the Blinking Word

The difference between listening and pretending to listen is enormous. Real listening is a willingness to let the other person change you. When I'm willing to let them change me, something happens between us that's more interesting than a pair of dueling monologues.

*Alan Alda
American Actor*

3.1 Listening Assessment

ABOUT THIS TOOL—Increasing one’s self-awareness is indispensable to be an effective manager. This assessment will help identify your strengths as a listener, as well as less helpful habits that need addressing.

Each item is to be considered in its own right. There is no cumulative score. Some describe effective listening habits, others that hamper listening well to others.

APPLICATION—Using a scale from *1-Never* to *5-Always*, rate your listening habits, then reflect on the results, acknowledging your strengths and selecting one or two habits that you’d like to change. Feeling bold? Ask others to rate you using the same scale.

1. My body language makes it clear I am fully listening.	
2. I make the speaker feel as if he or she is the center of the conversation.	
3. I give the speaker plenty of time to talk.	
4. I refrain from interrupting the speaker.	
5. I look at the speaker with encouraging eye contact.	
6. I fidget with objects or otherwise act distracted.	
7. I help keep the speaker on track with paraphrasing.	
8. I probe for deeper understanding.	
9. I finish the speaker’s sentences.	
10. I convey an attitude of openness and sincerity.	
11. I put the speaker at ease, encouraging deeper sharing.	
12. I ask questions that open up the discussion.	
13. I ask questions to direct more discussion to a particular point, when helpful.	
14. I ask questions to draw out emotions as much as facts.	
15. I insert humorous remarks even when the speaker is serious.	
16. I sneak a peek at my watch or cell phone.	
17. I smile at the speaker and lean forward to convey interest.	
18. I’m willing to be influenced by what I hear.	
19. I create an atmosphere of trust and connection through listening.	
20. I demonstrate empathy through listening.	

Source: Adapted from Association for Talent Development (ATD), *Infoline bulletin*, date unknown

3.2 Five Ways to Be a Better Listener

ABOUT THIS TOOL—“Listening takes up more of your waking hours than any other activity...The quality of your friendships, the cohesiveness of your family relationships, your effectiveness at work—these hinge, in large measure, on your ability to listen.”⁵ Here are five ways to boost your listening prowess.

APPLICATION—Pick one of these skills to practice each week for the next five weeks. Make daily notes of your experience. At the end of five weeks, reflect on your overall experience. What seemed to be easy? Hard?

Commit to silence while the other person is talking.

Physically demonstrate your intention to listen through your posture and eye contact and by minimizing distractions.

Encourage the speaker with short verbal acknowledgements, such as “I see,” “Say more,” “Go on.”

Temper your self-talk to concentrate on what the speaker is saying. When you catch your mind wandering or preparing to respond, redirect your focus to the speaker.

Test your understanding of what the speaker is saying and feeling. For example, “Are you saying...?” “It seems you’re feeling...”

Source: Developed by the author

⁵ Robert Bolton, *People Skills* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 30

3.3 Follow the Blinking Word

ABOUT THIS TOOL—“You can get more of what you want from your work if you improve your listening and your understanding of how work really gets done, the challenges your organization faces, changes coming, and the challenges your boss faces...When you tune out, you miss out.”⁶

Following the blinking word forces you to pay close attention to what another person is saying.

APPLICATION—Review this technique then give it a try, and then try again. It will take continued practice to make following the blinking word, and better listening, routine.

Technique

1. Identify one word of what the speaker has said that *blinks* (stands out).
2. Ask about any one of the blinking words.
3. Listen for the answer.
4. Notice the blinking words in their answer and question one of them.
5. Pay attention to the answer.
6. Identify one blinking word in their answer and question it.

Example: You're having lunch with Brad, a coworker. As he talks, you *decide* to get curious and *really listen*. Brad says, “This project is a nightmare. I can't wait for it to end.”

1. Speaker: “This project is a nightmare. I can't wait for it to end.”
You could inquire about project, nightmare, or end.
2. You: “Tell me more about the work. What makes it a nightmare?”
3. Speaker: “It's a nightmare because of the customer.”
4. You: “What about the customer makes this so hard for you?”
5. Speaker: “He complains about everything. Then he sets another impossible deadline.”
6. You: “Does he have total control over your deadlines?” or “Tell me about his biggest complaints.”

Source: Adapted from Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, *Love It, Don't Leave It* (SF: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 140-141

⁶ Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, *Love It, Don't Leave It* (SF: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 138