

## How To Be A Horrible Listener and Get Nothing Done

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It's funny how people won't shut up sometimes...  
and by people, I mean me.

So I'm sitting down in front of my team telling them about the next great idea I had. It was a fool proof strategy—I would talk and they would listen, be inspired, and get the job done. They sat there across from me staring into the wall behind me.

Their silence signaled they were obviously enraptured with my idea. It wasn't until I saw that nobody wanted to implement my idea that I realized that something was wrong.

### Who's Not Listening?

The same happened when I was talking one on one. I couldn't understand why. Why didn't people just acquiesce to the amazing ideas I had? Sometimes people would say I'm not listening. But that wasn't a problem because I was the one with the great ideas after all.

The thing is, even if you think you're a good listener it doesn't matter unless the people you listen to say that they feel listened to by you. Your opinion on your listening skills is hardly an accurate measure of your listening ability.

We tend to think that conversations are, in their most basic form, simply two people talking to one another. In reality, there are actually three conversations happening when two people talk to one another:

- The conversation between the two people.
- The conversation one person is having in their head with him/herself.
- The conversation the other person is having in their head with him/herself.

The funny thing is, all three of these conversations can happen without any listening actually occurring!



### What is the purpose of listening?

The purpose of listening is to create relationship. Without listening, we cannot connect to a person and without connection, there is no relatedness. In order for effective relationships to exist, there must be listening present.

Otherwise you just have two people doing a monologue in front of each other.

I invite you to consider that listening can be more influential than speaking in a relationship.

Listening can be powerful. It can even help you get your ideas across. The way you listen to someone determines the degree to which you have influence with them.

### 9 Ways to Listen with Influence

If you'd like to be a horrible listener and get nothing done, just do the opposite:

#### Be Open

*"Most of us don't listen with the intent to understand; we listen with the intent to reply." -Stephen Covey*

Most people are closed listeners. They are closed in the sense that they "already know" who the speaker is, what they think, and what they will likely say. This doesn't allow for understanding and discovery of

the other person. In addition, the listener will not feel as free to share with you authentically because he/she picks up on the fact that you are closed to them. We get this way when we feel like we are right, valid, or justified in our thoughts about the other person. We don't have to change our beliefs, but we do have to let them go if we are going to be open in our listening. An open listener is a powerful listener and they can get people to tell them things that most people often cannot.

### **Create the Space to Listen**

No distractions. Don't multi-task. Be fully present. Most of us think we're being efficient when we're having a conversation while getting work done on the computer or sending emails on our phone. Stop. Be with the person talking to you. If you can't be fully with them, say so. Then let them know when would be a better time for you. It's more respectful than keeping one foot in your work and another in your conversation. Pick one or the other. Multi-tasking is not effective in many situations, and the same holds true when it comes to listening.

### **Listen to the Words People Are Saying**

This may seem like common sense. However, you've probably noticed that common sense is not all too common in today's world. To be an effective listener, make sure you hear the words people are saying. In fact, listen to the speaker's words as if you had to repeat them back to the speaker word-for-word. Often times we respond to what we think they said when in fact we didn't even get the words right.

### **Listen to the Emotions Behind The Words**

Once you've listened to words a person is saying it's times to go deeper. Pretend the speaker's forehead has a neon sign showing the emotions they are currently experiencing as they speak. Ask the speaker if he/she is actually feeling those emotions you saw on his/her forehead. If you get it right, the speaker feels heard, understood, and open to share deeper things with you. If you're incorrect, simply try again. The speaker will appreciate your effort to understand them and will create greater connection anyway. It also creates trust, which is the lifeblood of any relationship and organization.

### **Listen To The Heart Behind The Emotions**

Yes, there is something behind the emotions that we can listen for. Once you've understood the emotions behind the words the speaker is experiencing and conveying, you can listen to the heart. This means listening for:

1. What is important to the speaker?
2. What does he/she value?
3. What is the speaker deeply committed to?

Once you can hear the heart of the speaker, ask them if you guessed correctly. Getting the heart of the speaker will create the strongest bond and build long-term deep trust across different areas of life. A master listener is both open to and can hear the heart of a speaker with velocity and accuracy.

### **Repeat Back What You Heard**

This is listening 101 but it's still critical. Repeat what you've heard to make sure the speaker feels heard and that you understood what is being said. You can also repeat back the emotions and heart of the speaker even though they aren't specifically stated. This means reading beneath what is said and repeating back what you heard at the deepest levels.

### **Ask For Permission to Share**

Sometimes people don't need your feedback or thoughts on what is shared. In fact, sometimes listening can be transformative enough. Because of being deeply listened to, the speaker is able to resolve problems, gain new insights, and increase their overall effectiveness at work and home.

As the listener, you become attached to the speaker's breakthrough even though you offered no advice. This is sometimes enough. After that, if there is something you want to say in response, simply ask permission. If they say yes, they will be all ears instead of defensive, busy, or closed off. Because great listening creates great listeners.