

Listening Skills

Listening is the most vital part of communication. If there is no listener there is hardly any point in speaking. Listening is receiver's ability to listen to the sender properly and decode the message to have clear understanding of ideas, thoughts or information, which sender wants to share. If the receivers fail to understand the message which has been expressed by the sender, they will also fail in providing a substantial and meaningful response. This wrong feedback is the root cause of many arguments, misunderstandings, and worries, at personal or professional life.

Listening is a skill that needs to be practiced. Ability to listen is the most critical skill required in managers and leaders. It provides them with all the information they need. Listening enables us to participate effectively in discussions and other interactions. Unless we listen to the points made or views expressed by the other participants in a speech, we would not be able to react rightly and to put forward our views. In nutshell, Listening means art of understanding others; it helps in climbing the ladder of success and is a great source of wisdom in life.

Importance of Listening:

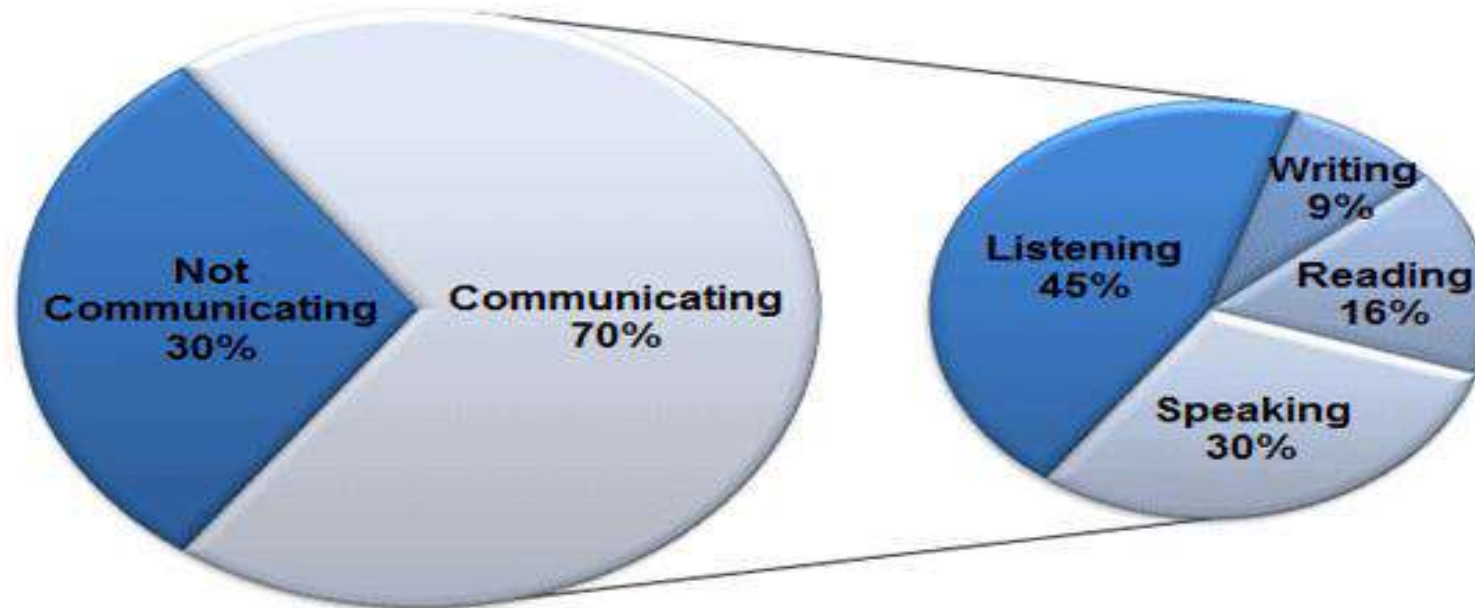
“Give thy ear to all but your tongue to a few”

- The Tragic History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1.3.71)

- Listening is very important part of everyone’s life, as through listening we can comprehend the language and understand the people around us. It may be interacting to customers or with subordinates or even to the whole world at large. Whether in business or personal life, listening is extremely important.
- The time spent on listening is always substantial. In fact listening is an important everyday means of gathering information and acquiring knowledge, it is even vital for socializing, for relaxation, for inspiration, and even for gaining new ideas officially or by listening to friends and peers.
- As a student one has to listen to lectures, seminars, presentations, discussions & instructions. Similarly as a professional listening takes place with boss, colleagues, subordinates within the organization. Likewise a judge, a psychiatrist, and a physician must possess special competence in listening.

According to Adler, R. et al. (2001) Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication, of this an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% and 9% writing.

Time Spent Communicating



Source: Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001) *Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating* (8th ed.), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.

Send reinforcements. we're going to advance.



Send three or four men. we're going to a dance.



Importance of Listening at Workplace

- Listening has vast importance not only at a personal level in life but also at workplace. Those Business owners of any segment, entrepreneurs, and the employees, who develop attentive listening skills and encourage this ability for others too, will be the most likely to keep their organizations progressing.
- Listening is a lively process that involves focusing on what is said without allowing erstwhile beliefs to obstruct the process. It is true that if people would concentrate on listening at work, they will gain profitable results such as increased productivity, more rapid progress towards target and more pleasant relationships between co-workers.
- The following are some points which further elaborate importance of listening at a workplace:

Calming complaining employees : Harvey Mackay, a businessman said, “You can win more friends with your ears than with your mouth”. Very often employees have certain grievances, all that they need is a listener. If a manager or a leader listens to them patiently their anger will be drained out and it will lead to calmness & peace of mind.

Formulating better policies: If a manager listens to his/her subordinates carefully, he/she will know that which policies are acceptable to all other members and are better suitable for the organizational success. This step may also accomplish the willing support of employees.

Open door strategy: Some managers use open door strategy and keep the doors open for employees to walk in and talk. It leads to better understanding and better upward communication. Sometimes it also happens that their doors are open but their ears are closed. This bad listening of managers leaves the employees in distress. Despite of this, if a manager listens patiently, employees will be encouraged to talk, and there will be free upward communication.

Spotting sensitive areas: Problems if not resolved could lead to serious disputes. It is important for managers and leaders to spot the sensitive areas and resolve complaints by finding better solutions to avoid serious disputes. Mahatma Gandhi as a leader was like an expert therapist, by analyzing the problems he listened patiently to the grievances of the people, and helped them to live a better life.

Increasing confidence: People, who listen well and carefully, tend to have better knowledge and clear understanding. Therefore, they are more confident in day to day activities and even while taking major decisions.

Forming a bond: True listening generates respect and trust between speaker and listener. Employees like to respond to those bosses who they think are listening to them.

Boosting productivity: Instead of only giving an advice, if a manager listens carefully to the explanation of problems and start working towards solution, employees will be more dedicated towards work and the productivity will rise.

Advancing innovations: If a leader or a manager listens properly to the ideas of people, and motivates them to implement it instead of controlling or curbing. This technique will show the way of new and innovative tactics of work. Listening makes employees feel better as it recognizes not only the value of the employee viewpoint but also the value to the employee of being listened to.

Enhancing accuracy: Listening in a better way leads to a huge recollection of important facts and issues, resulting in more accuracy while solving complex issues, with lesser miscommunication and faults.

Knowing your organization : Careful listening to the grapevine helps to know the members of the staff, about the company's activities and policies. Therefore, it leads to better understanding of organization, it also facilitates in predicting what changes are required for growth.

Developing better relations: Listening develops better relations between individuals or groups within an organisation. For Example – Employees may have certain grievances against the management. If the management listens to these grievances then hostilities can be removed or diminished from the minds of the employees. This can lead to better bonds or relationship between the two parties that in turn can lead to improvement in efficiency of the organisation.

Helping in sharing experience: Listening helps to share experiences. For example, in conferences, experts can share their experiences with the participants. In committees, the senior members can share their experiences with the junior members. Such sharing of experiences can be a good learning experience to the listeners.

Helping in decision making : listening helps in proper decision making . After careful listening to the subordinates as well as the superiors, managers can make proper decision relating to incentive schemes, marketing activities and so on.

A wise man once said, “We never learn anything with our mouth open. We can only learn by reading, by listening, by observing and by doing” (Rega, M.). Thus, the importance of listening is at the core of communication, it may be anywhere with anyone. In business it is important for a manager to encourage employees to listen one another in order to build an environment that promotes cooperative team work and innovative problem solving.

Brown, M. (2004) wrote, that “Listening is a learned behavior. Just as decoding the written word is not the same as comprehending its meaning, hearing a sound is not the same as understanding what is being said”. Proper listening is again very important in making a comfortable environment, to attract and retain good people in an organization, to develop healthy relationships and for the growth of the organization.

Features of Listening

➤ **Process:** Listening is a process of hearing and understanding the message of the speaker

The process of listening includes:-

- Paying attention to the message
- Interpretation and evaluation of the message
- Responding
- Retaining the message

➤ **Types of listening:** listening is of various types varying from situation to situation. It depends upon the content, purpose, the speaker as well as the listener. The types are:-

- **Active listening:-** where the listener listens with interest and encourages the speaker with continue speaking
- **Appreciative listening:-** the listener appreciates the views , opinions and ideas expressed by the speaker through body language, cues or otherwise.

- **Informational listening**:- where the listener listens in order to learn from the speaker
 - **Content listening**: selectively listening to only those contents relevant to the listener
 - **Empathetic listening** : active listening and empathising with the speaker
 - **Evaluative listening**: critical review of what is being said by the speaker.
 - **Reflective listening**: where the listener tries to understand the speaker's idea , and then reverting the idea back to the speaker so as to confirm that the idea has been understood correctly.
- **Obstacles in listening** : there are several barriers to listening , which are:-
- **Marginal listening**: According to studies listening is 3 times faster than speaking, the listener can become distracted and this could lead to a loss of communication.
 - **Language barrier**: the listener cannot understand the language being spoken by the speaker. This could be that the speaker does not know have a good command over the language too.

- **Emotional problems:** the listener could be unhappy or angry at the earmarks of the speaker. Also the listener could be happy an excited and thus failed to listen effectively.
- **Noise:** there is a possibility that there could be some noise in the background that could distract the listener. This could be loud music or traffic noise.
- **Problems of forced listening:** many a times a listener may be forced to listen to the speaker. For example students forced to sit through the lecture.

Benefits of listening: Listening benefits both the speaker as well as the listener:

- The listener may retain important aspects of the message
- Listening may help to take decisions and solve problems
- Listening may help to develop good relations between the speaker and the listener

- It helps to share experiences between the speaker and the listener.
- It provides encouragement to the speaker

Listening is different from hearing: Listening is the art of hearing and understanding the message of the speaker. Listening requires hearing but the receiver must understand and evaluate the message as well.

Hearing involves only the use of ears but listening involve the use of Ears and Mind

Degree of Listening: Different listeners have different degree of listening :

- Some have poor listening skills and thus pay little or no attention to what is being said.
- Some may hear but not understand what is being said.
- Some listeners listen selectively to certain aspects
- A few listen attentively to all aspects , evaluate and retain some of them for sometime.

Fake listening : many a times the listeners nod approvingly to show that they are understanding what the speaker is saying but they are not paying any attention at all.

Listening and retention: Listeners may retain certain percentage of what they have heard. Certain studies indicate that listeners can retain 10-25% of a presentation and it is therefore necessary to make use of AV Aids to help retain concepts better.

Listening skills can be improved: Although many people receive formal training in Communication skills such as reading, writing, speaking yet few receive training in listening skills. This results in a lot of poor listeners. Proper training and self discipline is needed to become effective listeners.

References

Source: Taylor, S. (2006) *Communication for Business*, Pearson Education Ltd

<http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Ideas/Fun/Wordplay.htm>