



LISTEN UP!

Honing Your Listening Skills For Success

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So much attention is focused on what to say and how to say it.

In speeches, debates and conversation, we are obsessed with our message and how to express ourselves. Sometimes, this focus obscures our listening.

It's time we focus on *listening* skills as key to our success as communicators, leaders, servers and as human beings.

Any discussion on the importance of listening — vis-à-vis speaking — should acknowledge the fact that we were born with two ears and just one mouth. The implication: we should listen twice as much as we speak!

Believe it or not, Listening is a learned skill. While we are blessed with ears to hear with, listening is more than just hearing. *Listening* involves an active engagement.

By definition Listening means: "applying oneself to hearing something"

DID YOU KNOW...?

Here are some facts about listening, courtesy of colleague Louisa Rogers of Louisa Rogers Communications, in Eureka, CA:

1. All communication is received ... but 70-90% of the data is screened out or altered by the receiver. So what you say is NOT necessarily what the listener gets.
2. Listening is (incorrectly) not perceived as powerful by most people.
3. We have a strong cultural tendency to tune out. Our minds go forward (What do I say next? How do I defend myself? What shall I have for lunch?), or in reverse (Did I turn the car lights off? Did I get an e-mail back from...?).
4. Rates of speaking / listening: We listen at 1,000-1,200 words a minute. We speak at 300 words a minute. Thus, our minds wander.

Based on Louisa's findings I believe the following: where there's a will, there are ways to become a better listener.

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING...LISTEN!

Alas, we can become better listeners once we set our mind and ears to it.

Vow to become a better listener:

1. Monitor your own listening: where do you follow the speaker and where do you tune out? Analyze for yourself why it is you tune out where you do.

2. Suspend judgment when you listen, focusing instead on comprehension. Many times we immerse ourselves in our own analysis of what is heard: do I agree or disagree? Focus instead on comprehension.
3. Listen for the meta-message: the message within the message. Sometimes what people AREN'T saying is also insightful. Listen between the lines.
4. Become an Active Listener: listen with your ears, mind, head and heart. Concentrate on listening as if you will be tested on what this person has said and need to share it with a class of strangers. Can you do it?
5. Active listening involves not only following along with the speaker, but letting him or her know you are tracking their message. Use nods, gestures and utterances to convey comprehension or confusion, so they receive feedback you are with them, or not. A furrowed brow, a tilt of the head or squinting signals to them you are confused. A nod, a smile or other gestures indicates understanding.
6. Remember that confirming understanding doesn't imply concordance. Confirming your comprehension of one's communication doesn't automatically mean you agree with everything.
7. Short phrases are useful to your listener. These utterances convey understanding:

"I see"

"yep"

"uh-huh!"

"hmmm"

Phrases that let the listener know you are hazy about their meaning:

"huh?"

"I'm not sure I understand"

"what do you mean?"

"please elucidate"

9. A great way to confirm for your listener and yourself that you understand is to periodically paraphrase or replay what you believe you heard. It's a reality check that allows you both to continue with confidence.

Whether you are brokering peace in the Middle East or a squabble with a family member at the dinner table, I find wisdom in Stephen Covey's proscription to "seek first to understand, then to be understood."

So hang out your "Hear Here" sign, follow this *sound* advice and listen for success!



San Francisco Bay Area-based Professional speaker Craig Harrison founded Expressions of Excellence!™ to provide sales and service solutions through speaking. For information on keynotes, training, coaching, curriculum for licensing and more, call (510) 547-0664 or visit www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.