

# Listening Skills:

*“I listened, motionless and still; and, as I mounted up the hill, the music in my heart I bore, long after it was heard no more” – William Wordsworth*

By Liggy Webb

**L**istening is one of the most underrated life skills and yet one of the most powerful. When you fully engage and actively listen, you can learn so much and yet, at times, we spend more time on transmit than we do on receive. You tend to find that people are either interesting (good talkers) or interested (good listeners). The real trick here is to be able to develop a blend of both skills.

Listening and understanding what others communicate to us is the most important part of successful interaction and vice versa. When a person decides to communicate with another person, they do so to fulfil a need. The person wants something, feels discomfort, has feelings or thoughts about something. In deciding to communicate, the person selects the method or code which they believe will effectively deliver the message to the other person.

The code used to send the message can be either verbal or nonverbal. When the other person receives the coded message, they go through the process of decoding or interpreting it into understanding and meaning.

*“Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets and understands the sender’s message in the same way the sender intended it.”*

We were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking. Listening can be challenging; we can become preoccupied and not listen because our internal voice is having a little chat with us. Some people are so interested in getting their point across that they just wait for a gap in the conversation so that they can jump in with their bit.

We can also get so bogged down with own personal beliefs about what is being said that we don’t remain objective and listen to the whole message.

There are essentially three modes of listening. These include competitive or combative listening, which happens when we are more interested in promoting our own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else’s view. We either listen for openings to take the floor, or for flaws or weak points we can attack.

As we pretend to pay attention, we are impatiently waiting for an opening, or internally formulating our rebuttal and planning our devastating comeback that will destroy their argument and make us the victor.

Another is passive or attentive listening, where we are genuinely interested in hearing and understanding the other person’s point of view. We are attentive and passively listen. We assume that we heard and understand correctly, but stay passive and do not verify it.

Active or reflective listening is the single most useful and important listening skill. In active listening, we are also genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means, and we are active in checking out our understanding before we respond with our own new message.

*“Listen or thy tongue will keep thee deaf”*

Indian Proverb

**W**e restate or paraphrase our understanding of their message and reflect it back to the sender for verification. This verification or feedback process is what distinguishes active listening and makes it effective.

Listening effectively can be difficult, because people vary in their communication skills and in how clearly they express themselves and often have different needs, wants and purposes for interacting.

The first step to effective listening is to give yourself permission to really listen to someone. Tell yourself that you are going to focus on what they have to say and give them 100% attention. It also helps if we demonstrate that we are listening and, in face-to-face conversation, eye contact is key.

Really taking an interest in what others have to say will help you to understand people better and to be more empathetic. Everyone has an interesting story to tell and, by actively listening, you will learn so much more about others which will help you to grow and develop as an individual.

Not only will you benefit from listening; you will also make other people feel special because listening is the silent form of flattery.

### **Listening Skills - Useful Tips**

- Give yourself permission to listen and give 100%.
- Use eye contact and listening body language.
- Make active listening sounds if you are on the telephone.
- Be empathic and non-judgmental.
- Paraphrase and use your own words to check understanding.
- Don't wait for the gap to jump in with your point.
- Inhibit your impulse to immediately answer questions.
- Don't finish people's sentences.
- Two ears - one mouth - in that order!
- Listen and Learn.

**Life is what YOU make it!**

The above article is an extract from *The Happy Handbook - A Compendium of Modern Life Skills*



by Liggy Webb which is out now.

**Liggy Webb is widely respected as a leading expert in the field of *Modern Life Skills and Workplace Wellness.***

As a presenter, consultant and author she is passionate about her work and improving the quality of people's lives. She is the founding director of The Learning Architect a consortium of niche industry experts. Liggy has developed a range of techniques to support individuals and organizations to cope more effectively with modern living and the demands and challenges of life in the twenty tens and beyond.

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