

# Listening Narrative

Sharp listening skill will enable you to be an effective manager. The most effective managers are great listeners. Listening is a skill that requires practice and patience. Losing focus during a meeting can allow you to be taken off guard and sometimes cause embarrassment. Some of the key aspects to becoming a great listener are:

1. Listening to the entire message before rushing to judgment or before responding. Listening is not just hearing what is said. Good listening is when you not only absorb the facts that are said, but interpret them as well.
2. Ensure comprehension of the main points of the presenter. This is interpretation taken one step further. You must understand what has been said and be able to relate to the reasoning behind the information.
3. Give your full attention to the speaker and keep focus on what they are trying to communicate and not how they deliver it. You can interpret information faster than we can speak it ([http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/ss\\_listening.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/ss_listening.html)). This makes it very easy to get distracted.
4. Ask questions when appropriate to ensure comprehension of the main topics. This will also communicate your interest in the speaker's topic.
5. Provide feedback, verbal or through body language, during and after the speaker complete. Good eye contact will also keep you from other distractions.

Everyone thinks that they are great listeners, but his is seldom the truth. According to the listening self-assessment (<http://positive-way.com/quiz/listening.html>) my listening skill could use some improvement. Here is how I scored:

Questions	My Answer	Correct Answer	Results
1. I avoid staying on any one subject with my partner.	Rarely	Rarely	Correct
2. I make assumptions about my partners feelings or thoughts.	Not Often at all	Not often at all	Correct
3. I respond to my partner's suggestions or opinions with, yes but.	Usually	Not very often	Incorrect
4. I bring up past issues during current disagreements.	Sometimes	I don't do this	Incorrect
5. I interrupt my partner's conversation.	Rarely	Rarely	Correct
6. I use sarcasm or jokes to respond when my partner talks.	Rarely	Rarely	Correct
7. I respond to a complaint with a complaint.	Rarely	Rarely	Correct
8. I insult and criticize my partner.	I don't do this	I don't do this	Correct
9. I respond to my partner with phrases like...that's ridiculous.	Not often	Not often	Correct

10. I see only my point of view.	I consider what they have to say.	I consider what they have to say.	Correct
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Using this test I have decided that I need improvement when listening to other people's suggestions as well as using past mistakes against the speaker. As an experiment I decided to improve on my skills and evaluate the techniques that I have outlined. Making a conscious effort, I expected to score high marks. Here is how the meeting transpired:

### Listening Skills Evaluation Meeting:

- At 11:00am, our department manager called an emergency meeting scheduled for 2:00pm. For this meeting, I tried to improve upon my listening skills by showing up early so I could get a good seat at the front of the conference room.
- As 2:00 approached we all became frustrated because our boss was nowhere to be found. We called his cellular phone and he said that we would have to start it at 2:30 instead of 2:00. We also had to change the location of the meeting to our break room because of the time change. Despite our boss showing up late I made sure to keep a good attitude about it and not hold it against him.
- All talk points are place on the wipe-board at the beginning of the meeting so I created an skeleton outline of the topics to covered.
- Don (my boss) began to speak about some new organizational changes that were being put in place and how it affected our group. I was very attentive, showing eye contact and, in addition, we all asked questions to ensure that we understood the changes in full detail.
- As our boss explained how one of our members was leaving the group, but she would still be working closely with us, I found myself distracted with CNN playing on the TV in the background. As I watched a person putting gas at a filling station and escaping a stray car that hit the pump I burst out "Oh my god!" The entire group watched the replay and gasped. I was embarrassed about my outburst.
- After that incident I made sure that my attention did not stray. There was plenty of discussion about how our group would conduct business without our fellow co-worker.
- Don took in the feedback, but insisted that the changes would be positive.

Despite my efforts at improving my listening skills, I failed to give the speaker my full attention. I was easily distracted by a TV set when the subject was focused on the impact on a different area of the department. I did, however, abide by the four of the five points that I mentioned at the beginning. Even though my boss was a half an hour late to the meeting I didn't show my frustration. I took notes on the main points of the meeting, but I did fail to provide my full attention throughout the entire meeting. Our group, including myself, asked thorough questions concerning the topic to ensure comprehension of the organizational changes and provided feedback to our manager. Our manager also communicated his concern and expressed his feelings about the change to ease our minds. Practice makes perfect and as you can see, I need plenty of it.

Good listening requires patience, focus and practice. Patience is not only a virtue, but also a necessity to become a great manager. Letting someone communicate their entire message without interruption is hard, but will ensure that the entire view of the speaker is communicated. Maintaining a good mental focus is also difficult. As I stated earlier, we can interpret data faster than we can speak it. This gives our minds time to wonder and get distracted. Some tips to keeping yourself from getting distracted are:

1. Maintain eye contact - This will not only communicate interest in the subject, but also keep you focused on the speaker.
2. Ask mental questions - ask questions like:
  - a. What point is the speaker trying to make?
  - b. How does this fit into the rest of what has been communicated?By doing this you will almost be able to anticipate what the speaker is going to say before they actually say it. ([http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/ss\\_listening.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/ss_listening.html))
3. Remember that listening is an iterative process - The image below shows the different stages of the process.



Source: <http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/spd110td/interper/images/liststages.gif>

Above all, remember that listening is a skill and with all skills they require practice to refine. Good managers can become great managers by honing their listening skills.