

# **Can you hear me now? *NOT* so good!**

## *My five- step program to listening rehabilitation*

### **Step 1: Admitting you have a problem**

Hi. My name is Michael Williams, and I am a bad listener. As difficult as it may be to admit it sometimes, it is true. I have always known this. My friends, family, and coworkers remind me constantly. I have even had those closest to me comment on the irony of someone with my poor listening skills working for a company with the catch phrase "Can you hear me now. Good." I get caught tuning out, getting distracted, butting in, and violating almost every other rule associated with good listening skills. My deficiency isn't a nonstop occurrence, but it has definitely become a habit and, therefore, is in need of rehabilitation.

### **Step 2: Defining your problem areas**

My friends have described me as a "selfish listener." According to them, I can easily initiate a conversation whole-heartedly and remain focused at the beginning, but my attention will quickly taper off if the discussion fails to remain centered on something that directly benefits me. I also continually interrupt the speaker by interjecting my own statements, most often in an effort to shift the attention back to something that focuses on me. Other times, my interruptive comments may be the result of an attempt at personal redemption when I am being criticized or disagree with the speaker.

### **Step 3: Devising a plan of action**

The first step, admitting you have a problem, really is the most difficult step to complete. After coming to terms with my bad habit and having clearly defined the faults that inhibit my listening ability, I created an action plan for improvement. In order to rid myself of my "selfish" listening habits, I will implement the following techniques:

#### **→ Let the speaker finish before I begin to talk.**

Interrupting a speaker only disrupts his or her thought process and hinders the entire communication exchange completely. Often times during a conversation, I will cut off the speaker by adding my own comments or questions. To combat this habit, I will take notes as I am listening and make a list of questions to ask at the end of the speaker's presentation. Then, once the speaker has completed his

or her part of the conversation, I will review my notes and begin my response.

→ **Avoid emotional involvement.**

Becoming emotionally involved in a conversation causes a listener to filter out vital pieces of information. If at any point in a communications exchange I feel as if I am being directly criticized or personally attacked, I instantly react defensively without allowing the speaker to complete his or her part of the conversation. To correct this habit, I will try to remain objective and open-minded during conversations. I will allow the speaker to exhaust his or her part of the discussion regardless of my emotional reaction to what he or she is saying.

→ **Display physical signs of understanding.**

By visibly acknowledging an active state of listening, a listener will signal understanding to the speaker. This will allow the communication exchange to continue seamlessly. Currently, I tend to maintain a stoic, indifferent countenance when I am engaged in conversation. This misleads the speaker to think that I am uninterested and not attentive. I can correct this behavior by nodding my head to signal that I understand the speaker. Maintaining eye contact will tell the speaker that I am focused and genuinely concentrating on the content of his or her speech.

**Step 4: Implement your action plan**

Each week, I am required to attend a “one-on-one” meeting with my store manager or assistant manager to discuss my previous and current weeks’ performance. These meetings are prime feeding ground for the listener-impaired and are typically filled with listening violations aplenty. In the next step of my listening recovery, I implemented my newly developed listening techniques.

**“ With every communication exchange, I will use these new methods. I will not regress. ”**

This weeks’ “one-on-one” meeting began as usual. Eddie, the store manager, had printed out all of the reports showing my productivity over the past week. He gave me a copy of the reports and began to discuss

my performance regarding quota attainment and accessory sales. As he spoke, I maintained consistent eye contact, occasionally looking down at my reports as he pointed out specific rankings. I nodded periodically to acknowledge my understanding of his recommendations of performance improvements. As he offered a few tips on how to increase my enhanced services ratio, I jotted a few quick notes on my report near that section to remind myself to ask a question when he had concluded his discussion. I circled a few numbers that I thought weren't correct and made a mental note to be certain to address these figures before the meeting ended.

Most of the information about my performance was positive, so there was no problem suppressing interruptions yet. My high value plan performance has always been a slightly sore subject for me. Eddie began to calmly address my inability to improve in this area over the last month and I felt frustration building up inside. But I maintained my focus. Nonetheless I suppose my displeasure must have shown through because Eddie paused and asked if I had a question. I advised him to please continue and I would ask all of my questions when he finished. I continued listening attentively, nodding to signal acknowledgement while maintaining eye contact.

### **Listen Up! 5-Step Rehab Program**



- 1 **Admit you have a problem**
- 2 **Define your problem areas**
- 3 **Devise a plan of action**
- 4 **Implement your action plan**
- 5 **Prepare for the future**

After Eddie finished his analysis of my performance, I quickly reviewed some of the notes and marks I had made on my reports to refresh my memory. I was able to begin my response easily. First, I asked questions on the items that I was unsure of and gave Eddie a chance to respond. Then, I made a few statements concerning my high value performance to clarify some concerns that Eddie may have had. Eddie was very receptive to my comments; he didn't interrupt me and he used physical signs of acknowledgement to let me know that he followed what I was saying. He never dropped eye contact and nodded as I spoke, taking notes in response to my concerns.

After the meeting, I felt as if I had made positive strides in my listening rehabilitation process. I was able to effectively combat my listening

weaknesses by executing the techniques I had developed in my action plan. My meeting with Eddie went much smoother than usual and I managed to walk away with some useful information.

### ***Step 5: Preparing for the future***

The road to recovery has officially begun. Like any newly developed skill, it will take lots of time and practice to master the art of good listening. Working at Verizon Wireless gives me many opportunities to sharpen my listening skills. After all, our biggest catch phrase is “Can you hear me now? Good.” It is a communications company filled with coaching sessions, conference calls, staff meetings, and training sessions. Not to mention at least eight full hours a day of customer and coworker interaction.

With every communication exchange, I will attempt to continue implementing the methods that were so effective in my meeting with Eddie. I can also check with those closest to me to measure my progress. Since they are the ones who suffer because of my “selfish” listening habits, they are the best source of tracking my rehabilitation progress. I’ve already informed my family and friends of my desire to upgrade my listening effectiveness, and have asked them to help me by calling out instances where I regress to my old ways.

**Although I’m only a couple of weeks in to my new life of upgraded listening skills,** I feel as if the battle is almost won. The war, however, is definitely far from over. But with my new five-step program and some positive thinking I know I can be a listening rehab success story.