



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES FOUR

MODULE THREE: LISTENING



Outline Session

1. Listening

LISTENING

Communication involves more than just speaking; it also involves actively listening. This is not just listening with our ears (which is critical), but also with our heart, mind and spirit so that we really hear.

Biblical reflection on listening

In the Hebrew language, the root word of both 'hear' and 'listen' is the word *sama* (pronounced shmah), a verb which occurs some 1050 times in the Old Testament. In most contexts the meaning extends beyond just the physical act of hearing to suggest processing and responding to what was said (cf. Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

Jesus spoke of how his sheep must know his voice, listen for his voice and follow his voice (John 10:4–5). In the book of Revelation, Jesus asked that '*...anyone with ears to hear...*' in the seven churches of Asia Minor '*...must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches*' (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6,13, 22). Again, the emphasis is not just on audibly hearing words, but on active listening, then processing and responding to what has been said.

Develop a capacity to concentrate and listen with the purpose of comprehension.

On average, people can speak at a rate of 125–175 words a minute (speed of speech), and our brains can process 400–800 words per minute (speed of thought) as words are being communicated to us.

As leaders, we need to be good listeners. Listening is hard work.

IDEAS FOR HOW TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS OF BEING AN ATTENTIVE AND EMPATHETIC LISTENER

This list is adapted from Madelyn Burley-Allen's book, *Listening: The Forgotten Skill* and Neil Flanagan and Jarvis Finger's book, *Just About Everything A Manager Needs to Know*.

1. Commit yourself to really listen

Whenever you need to hear everything someone is saying, commit yourself – really commit yourself – to listen. Accordingly, focus *all* your listening capacity on the speaker. Actually *want* to listen better.

2. Concentrate on what the person is saying.

When listening, listen. Be attentive. Listening is not a passive activity. Fight the 'switch off' syndrome. The more you work at concentrating while listening, the more your powers of concentration will develop and the easier listening will become.

3. Be interested in the person you're listening to and in what they're saying.

Don't be in a hurry or give the impression that you're speaking to them to fill in time. Value people and their words.

4. Show the speaker you are listening.

We do so by:

- Brief expressions such as: 'I see', 'right', 'interesting' or 'I understand'
- Maintain eye contact (or whatever is appropriate in your culture)
- Non-verbal acknowledgement, such as: head nodding, facing the speaker, smiling, facial and body expressions that are relaxed and open
- Door openers such as: 'tell me more about it', 'would you like to talk about it?', 'let's discuss it', 'sounds as if you've got some ideas or feelings about this', or 'I'd be interested in what you have to say'
- Don't interrupt the speaker's train of thought by interrupting with a response until the speaker has finished

5. Mentally screen out distractions, like background activity, noises, phones ringing or buzzing, our own thoughts, the speaker's mannerisms, daydreaming, emails you're currently drafting or things you have to do.

6. Neutralise your biases and emotions.

Don't let how you feel about the speaker's voice, character, appearance, reputation or the subject being discussed distort the real message. Keep an open mind; listen without judging or jumping to conclusions. Stay calm. Don't get upset.

7. Seek for comprehension

Seek to grasp what they are trying to say by identifying the main points they're communicating. Search also for the implications of what is being said. If listening for a long time, try to remember concepts, key words, ideas, or phrases.

8. Test your understanding

Ask for repetition, clarification, amplification, and examples. Summarise from time to time.

9. Don't respond prematurely – either in your thoughts or words

Make sure you comprehend what the person is saying before you judge the message. Resist the temptation to prematurely debate, evaluate or interpret the message instead of listening to all that is being said.

10. Pay attention to what *isn't* being said—to nonverbal cues (such as their body language). Eyes, facial expressions, body language and general demeanour are like a second voice. Watch out for these also. They can indicate a lot about how the person feels, sometimes more so than their words.

11. Don't talk too much.

You can't talk and listen at the same time. Let them dominate the discussion. This will allow you to stay discussed – to listen.

12. Where and when appropriate, **respond to what has been shared** with a view to engage in meaningful conversation.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING AND RESPONSES.

Most of these are adapted from Burley-Allen's book on Listening:

- Never minimise or trivialise what a person is feeling or facing
- Don't use stock phrases like, 'Oh, it's not that bad', 'You'll be better tomorrow', or 'It'll blow over. Don't be upset'
- Try to empathise; that is, try to feel what the speaker is feeling
- Share your own experiences to show understanding
- If you require clarity on something the person has said, wait for the person to pause
- Ensure you ask open-ended questions that require a thoughtful response, rather than closed questions that can be answered with just 'yes' or 'no'
- Endeavour to follow some ground rules for a conversation of this nature:
 - Don't interrupt
 - Don't take the subject off in another direction
 - Don't interrogate
 - Don't teach or preach
 - Do reflect back to the talker what you observe and how you believe the talker feels
- Guide and help them to see the solutions for themselves, rather than just tell them what to do

Best-selling author, Dr Rachel Naomi Remen, wrote, 'The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Perhaps the most important thing we give each other is our attention.'

REFERENCES IN THIS MODULE:

Madelyn Burley-Allen, **LISTENING: THE FORGOTTEN SKILL**,

Neil Flanagan and Jarvis Finger, **EVERYTHING A MANAGER NEEDS TO KNOW**, Brisbane, QLD: Plum Press, 1998.

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<https://listenlikealawyer.com/speed-of-speech-speed-of-thought>.

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