

Leadership Bites: Listening

LEADERSHIP LEARNING IN 20 MINUTES

NHS

Leadership Academy

South East

Introduction

Communication between people is more important than ever, yet in our busy work and home schedules we seem to spend less and less time really listening to one another. Genuinely listening to someone and being listened to means we must give our time and ask for time, but why is it so important?

- *It helps build and maintain relationships at work and at home*
- *Solve problems by improving our understanding and accuracy*
- *Resolve conflicts*
- *Build strong, lasting friendships and careers*

At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant partners and children who can solve their own problems.

Misconceptions around listening

There are some common misconceptions or myths about listening which can influence how we feel and in turn make the listening process less effective. It is important, when developing listening skills to understand what the myths of listening are to enable our understanding of listening to be more accurate. A few misconceptions are;

- *It's difficult to learn how to listen*
- *I'm already a great listener*
- *Intelligent people are better listeners*
- *Hearing is the same as listening*
- *We get better at listening as we get older*



Skilful listening

When someone feels as though they're being listened to, they're more likely to open up and talk honestly. There are 3 types of listening listed below. Once you've read them, think about which level you tend to listen at? What could you do to increase the level?

1. **Level 1 Internal listening** - At this level our attention is on ourselves. We may be hearing the words but are we truly listening to them? You may be listening but in terms of what it means to you. You may hear the words of the other person but you're thinking of your own stories, judgements and opinions.
2. **Level 2 Focused listening** - At this level you're focused on the other person listening to what they say and how they say it. Your mind talk has all but disappeared and you're not trying to work out your next question. Instead, your attention is entirely upon trying to understand. You will be using this level of listening to gather information solely for the benefit of your team member rather than you.
3. **Level 3 Global listening** - At level 3 there is a softer focus that takes in everything including all that happens at level 2. This is where you listen to what's not being said. You consciously notice other

stimuli such as gestures and body movements and look for congruence. The individual not only feels understood but they understand more about why things are/not happening and not just what's happening.

How well do I listen?

To see how effective you think you are in practising good listening techniques, read through the question grid below and have a go at answering these questions about yourself. Once you have completed it, take a few minutes to reflect on your scores; what do you notice and what could you do differently.

Remember - be honest with yourself!

Question	Almost Always	Usually	Seldom	Never
Do you withhold judgement about the person's idea until he/she has finished?	4	3	2	1
Can you listen fully even though you think you know what he/she is about to say?	4	3	2	1
Can you listen non-judgementally even if you do not like the person who's talking?	4	3	2	1
Do you stop what you're doing and give full attention when listening?	4	3	2	1
Do you give the person appropriate eye contact head nods, and non-verbals to indicate that you are listening?	4	3	2	1
Do you listen regardless of the speaker's manner of speaking? (i.e. grammar, accent, choice of words)	4	3	2	1
Do you question the person to clarify his/her ideas more fully?	4	3	2	1
Do you restate/paraphrase what's said and ask if you got it right?	4	3	2	1
Totals				

Top Tips to effective listening

1. *Create the time to listen* – this is the biggest barrier to effective listening. When we're busy, we try to save time by speeding up conversations. Of course, there are always going to be quick 5-minute chats, but if someone needs your full attention for something which is clearly worrying them; something important to them, give the space to talk and give yourself the time to listen to them.
2. *Make sure it's the right environment* - a 'side of the desk' conversation has its uses, but if the matter is personal or important, possibly even emotional, look for a private space.
3. *Face the speaker and maintain eye contact* – it can be distracting for the speaker if your attention is elsewhere, it can also seem that you don't care, or aren't interested. It impacts the trust and openness between people; friends, partners, parents and colleagues.
4. *Be attentive, but relaxed* - don't be distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, or biases, and try to block out background distractions, and certainly try to avoid clock watching.
5. *Keep an open mind* - listen without judgement or jumping to conclusions. We often have a natural tendency to try and 'fix' the problem for people which is usually with good intention, but mostly all that's required is someone to listen
6. *Listen to the words* - when it's your turn to listen, don't spend the time planning what to say next; concentrate on what's being said and not what to respond.
7. *Decide to listen and don't interrupt* - listening is a choice, deciding to stop talking and start listening is an important step. Even when they pause or there seems to be an awkward silence creeping in; think of this as 'thinking time' for them; space and time to simply think.
8. *Try to feel what the speaker is feeling* - to experience empathy, you have to put yourself in the other person's place and allow yourself to feel what it is like to be them at that moment; it facilitates communication like nothing else does.
9. *Give the speaker regular feedback and pay attention to what isn't said (the nonverbal cues)* - tell them what you see; they're talking about something they are excited about – share that you see their excitement. If they're talking about something which is upsetting or worrying them, share that you see the impact of this worry. Also, if they are saying one thing, but their body language or tone of voice is saying something else, share this too. Sometimes the most open conversations lead to the most trusting of relationships, and this comes from being honest about what hear vs what you see.
10. Ask *questions and summarise to make sure you've fully understood* – this will not only help the speaker to know you're really listening, but also help them to understand what they've shared. Be curious, if your intuition (that gut feeling we all know and have) is telling you to explore, follow it.

Further learning ...

For further information and learning, as well as suggested activities, feel free to visit the [People.NHS.uk](https://www.People.NHS.uk) website or our [South East Leadership Academy site](#).



Time to reflect...



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Take some time to note down your thoughts on what you've learned;

What resonated?

What has made you curious?

What small changes could you make to start having an impact differently and quickly?

What might you need to share with your team, and commit to 'testing and learning' together?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their reflections on the questions above.