

## Listen Up!

By Kim Freedman

Studies have shown that most managers spend between 60 to 80 percent of their workday communicating with other people on the telephone, in meetings, and in casual conversations. Assuming we listen as much as we speak, which is a pretty big assumption, we spend a good portion of our day in listening mode.

Are you a good listener? Before you answer, check to see if you recognize yourself in any of the following scenarios:

- While the other person is talking, I'm formulating my response.
- I sometimes wish that the other person would hurry up and 'spit it out' so I can get back to what I was doing.
- I often interrupt people with my advice, insights, and solutions before they have finished speaking.
- While someone else is speaking, I multitask by checking email, texting, or answering the phone.
- In conversations, I usually talk more than the other person talks.
- I often get bored and daydream instead of listening.

Sound familiar? In all of these scenarios, you might be hearing the words the other person is saying, but your attention is squarely on you. If you are listening at all, you are listening to your internal dialogue. You might engage in the conversation, but you do so to offer advice or tell your own stories.

Listening is more than hearing. Hearing occurs when your ears pick up sound waves and transmit them from the eardrum to the brain. For example, you may be conscious of the sound of speech coming from the radio, surrounding you in a crowded restaurant, or penetrating through your office wall, but you are not really listening to any of it. Hearing is passive, whereas listening is an active process of assigning meaning to what you hear and responding to both the verbal and non-verbal messages being sent. **Active listening is acting on what you hear.**

When actively listening, you are:

- Not talking, to others or yourself. You can't listen if you are talking.
- Trying to understand the other person's point of view.
- Not voting. Active listeners are open, non-judgmental, curious, and affirming.
- Looking, acting, and being genuinely interested in what the other person is saying.
- Observing non-verbal behavior so that you can better interpret the message.
- Listening between the words for explicit and implicit meaning.
- Ensuring your understanding through rephrasing, effective questioning, and clarifying.



It's not very realistic to listen at this deep level 100 percent of the time. And, in all honesty, not every business conversation requires active listening. But, some conversations demand it. Think of the potential advantages of active listening when negotiating with a client, attempting to resolve a conflict, or when coaching a team member. Active listening can dramatically improve your ability to build trust and to influence others. Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, said "One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears—by listening to them."

A few people are naturally gifted listeners. And, then there are the rest of us. Active listening is a skill that can be learned and developed with practice.

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Kim Freedman, President of [Catalyst Leadership Coaching, LLC](#), uses customized training programs and one-on-one coaching to help businesses develop effective leaders and productive teams. She also offers personal coaching to professionals who want to achieve their goals and have more time, energy, and money in the process.