

## Unleash the Power of Listening

A vital skill in becoming an effective communicator is the ability to listen. Listening skills are not taught in school, and sadly are largely undeveloped skill in many people. To listen effectively is a powerful skill that can be learnt and practiced. You will gain more respect and esteem through listening rather than through talking. It's funny how sometimes you associate a certain phrase with someone. I knew someone called Ray and what I remember about him the most was when he was listening to someone talk he would keep saying "I hear you"; I would wonder whether he was saying that because he heard, but disagreed with what the person was saying, or if it was a noncommittal filler. There is however a great difference between hearing and listening. Hearing refers to the physical dimension of the sound waves striking the ear and the brain processing them into meaningful information. Listening, however, involves far more than the hearing process. It incorporates paying attention and focusing with the intention of understanding and responding appropriately. The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and to be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them. Not only that but when people feel that you have really listened to them, you will gain their respect and they will value and give you the credibility to speak. Consider how you feel when you sense someone is really listening to what you have to say. You feel good, you feel understood, and more connected to the person who is listening. The fact that they are interested causes you to feel cared for.

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and to be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them. One important element of listening is the ability to attend. Attending is the process where we focus in on a message and filter out others that are distracting. It is to be able to focus on what the person is saying, and filter out all the other things that may be happening at the same time. Someone once said (his name was anonymous) that the reason history repeats itself is because no one was listening the first time. When I first heard that, I realized history always repeating in my house especially around bedtime! That is the time when my kids practice attending. They focus on what they are doing (and it's not homework) and filter me out as a distraction each time I remind them that it's bedtime! One of the biggest distractions to attending is our desire to talk. The desire to talk is so strong that while the other person is talking we can be thinking about what we are going to say next, and waiting for an opportunity to speak. As we focus on what we are going to say or interject, our attention goes from what the person is saying to our own thoughts. Although appearing to be interested and attentive, we can easily be distracted by our thoughts or something else that may be happening at the same time. At that point perhaps we do fall into merely hearing and not listening. Our mind's attention has drifted onto other things and is no longer intent on understanding and responding. True listening is a skill which needs to be learnt and practiced because the mind functions seven times more quickly than it is possible to speak. Therefore the mind needs to be slowed down and focused on what the person is saying, and not pay attention to other irrelevant thoughts or distractions. One of my all time favourite books is "The Success Principles" written by Jack Canfield. One of the Principles he writes about in the book is how to use the power of listening as a way of building rapport and connecting with people. Jack created a series of four questions that he uses in personal and business situations. He asks the questions one after another. The first time he tried it was with his sister Kim. He asked the first question and listened to her response. When she had finished he asked the next question, and continued in this manner through all the questions. Afterwards Kim smiled said to him "That's the best conversation I think we've ever had. I feel so clear and focused. I know exactly what I need to go and do now. Thank you"; He was amazed as he hadn't said a word except to ask the four questions, and had resisted the inclination to jump in with his own responses. He has found this works everytime and uses the questions frequently. I have used this strategy, but by using my own questions and have been amazed at the results. Not only have the questions given me a greater understanding of the person, but through the fact of actively listening to people without commenting or putting my 2 cents worth in they have experienced encouragement and a sense of connectedness. I now make sure that I ask questions and listen more than I speak. I want you to take a moment now to think of a question that you could use to practice actively listening, and resist the impulse to speak. When you have the opportunity, use your question or questions and experience the power of building rapport with others through the power of listening.

## About the Author

Barbara White &nbsp; trains individuals and organizations to become powerful and effective communicators.

Source: <http://www.improveskillsacademy.org>