



Pure Listening

Why is this important? People who listen with care and skill can generate immense respect and influence among other individuals or groups. A major element of building rapport is our skill in active and pure listening; not only can you hear what people are saying, you can also gain insights into their thinking and feelings.

"Listening is the highest form of courtesy."

Tom Peters in Passion for Excellence

My son, aged 6, gave me one of the most powerful lessons in my life regarding listening. One special day when I picked him up from school, he was excitedly telling me about his first lesson on the chanter, the instrument beginners start on in progression towards playing the bagpipes. He was taking some time in the retelling of all the details, as youngsters often do, so where was my focus? On what we were going to have for supper and the ingredients and shopping needed. He suddenly stopped talking, looked at me and said, "Mum, you are not listening to me at all." And he was right. So what did I miss out on? His story about his first chanter lesson, not to mention the opportunity to appreciate his experience and him.

✂ How many opportunities have you missed with customers, colleagues, suppliers, and your friends and family?

What is listening? A model for a conversation.

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|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Talk | Listen | Talk | Listen |
| Listen | Talk | Listen | Talk |

The assumption is that the above is the model for a conversation. The reality is somewhat different. Research has shown, through experimentation, that when people are listening, the following happens:

| | | | | | |
|--------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------------|
| Listen | React | Listen | Plan | Listen | Rehearse |
|--------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------------|

So, when we are quiet during the conversation we may only be listening for 50% of the time, while the other 50% is spent in reacting, planning and rehearsing what we are going to say next.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood. First the diagnosis, then the prescription." **Stephen Covey**

How can we improve and listen purely? The essentials:

Curiosity Be in a state of genuine curiosity. Keep your whole intention entirely on the other person; be fascinated about what they have to say; be connected to them, and absorb their words.

Inner chatter Stop the inner dialogue and chatter within you, and do not focus on rehearsing the next question. Keep an empty head; listen cleanly, as you don't know what will be said next!

Intention Your intention is towards the other person; listen with ears, eyes, and heart.

Body language subtly match the other person's posture.

Language Avoid making your language "you" centred; use their key words and language, with no distortions or deletions. Ask predominantly open questions.

Pause Allow the talker time to process what they are saying, and allow yourself time to process what you are hearing. Taking time displays a caring attitude and a willingness to listen.

E.A.R. Method

Explore – the art of asking questions is a valued skill.

- Ask brief and clear questions. If your question is ambiguous or unclear, so will the answer be.
- Use open questions which start with: *Who? How? When? Where? Why? What?*
- Closed questions can be asked to clarify information. They start with: *Do, Will, Can, Should, Might, If, Are...* and will often result in a yes/no answer.

Acknowledge – reflect both the *content* and the *feelings* of the communication.

Rephrase it so that you can check you have understood.

Respond – give your prescription *only* once you have made a complete diagnosis.

- Get feedback on your response. Seek agreement.



Leaders build rapport and relationships when they truly engage with people, and to engage they need to listen intently.

Practice and application: Rate out of 10 your current performance in pure listening. In your very next conversation, use the essentials and Explore and Acknowledge before Responding. Afterwards, reflect upon and rate your performance for that conversation. Ask the person with whom you were conversing how well they thought you listened to them? There is no failure – only feedback!