

CHALLENGE

A Herff Jones Impact Resource For Students

September, 2003

SEPTEMBER CHALLENGE:

Listening Skills

A good leader must also be a good listener. When communicating, one should listen more than one speaks. Listening is the receiving part of communicating. Listening is:

- **Receiving information with our ears and eyes**
- **Giving meaning to that information**
- **Deciding what you think or feel about that information,**
- **Responding to what you hear**

Here are some examples that involve listening:

- **attending meetings and classes**
- **talking one on one**
- **receiving instructions**
- **making decisions based on verbal information**
- **helping others**
- **using the telephone**

Benefits of good listening include:

- **Improves your self confidence**
- **People like it when you listen to them**

- **Good listeners are usually more efficient in completing tasks**
- **Careful listening can settle disagreements before they start**
- **Intelligent answers are easier when you have listened to the opinions of others**
- **Learning to listen helps you to respond more quickly to the needs of others**
- **Good listening can eliminate unnecessary mistakes**
- **A good listener can handle or ignore distractions**
- **A good listener can analyze a speaker's purpose**
- **A good listener negotiates effectively**
- **Good listening is courteous to the speaker**

Good listening is a communication skill that takes energy and know-how. To listen effectively one must hear and select information from the speaker and give it meaning, determine how we feel about it and respond quickly.



A listener must also understand the speaker's purpose to know how to listen most effectively. This purpose influences the way one listens and how one perceives what is said. The speaker and the listener should have the same purpose if the communication is to be effective. When listening to someone speak, make sure that the purpose is understood. Is the speaker:

- **Entertaining you?**
- **Providing important information?**
- **Persuading you?**
- **Sharing feelings?**
- **Making small talk?**

Ten characteristics of a good listener include:

1. **Making regular eye contact with the speaker**
2. **Asking questions for clarification**
3. **Showing concern by acknowledging feelings**
4. **Restating or paraphrasing some of the speaker's words to show that I understand them**
5. **Trying first to understand, then to be understood**

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(Continued from Page 1)

6. **Being poised and emotionally controlled**
7. **Reacting non-verbally with a smile, a nod, a frown, or a touch, if appropriate**
8. **Paying close attention and do not let my mind wander**
9. **Acting responsibly on what I hear**
10. **Not changing the subject without warning**

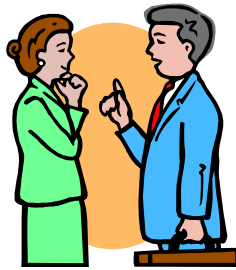
The following are 10 bad habits of listening:

1. **Interrupting often**
2. **Jumping to conclusions**
3. **Finishing other people's sentences**
4. **Trying to give too much advice**
5. **Making up your mind before getting all of the information**
6. **Compulsive note-taking (when it is not necessary)**
7. **Not giving any response when asked**
8. **Impatient**
9. **Temperamental**
10. **Thinking about your reply while the other person is speaking**

Change is hard, but try to take small steps to eliminate bad listening habits and focus on acquiring the good listening habits.

Hearing is the beginning of the listening process. It is non-selective and involuntary.

However, when you choose to listen, it is on purpose. Listening is voluntary.



Try this exercise. Sit quietly where people are talking around you - cafeteria, restaurant, etc. Listen for about 10 minutes and write down what you heard (what people said, other sounds and noises.) This activity will make you conscious of the many voices and sounds that you hear each day. It will remind you that listening begins with hearing but it is a voluntary activity. Also try this experiment with your eyes closed and see if the results are the same. Have a friend do the experiment at the same time and compare notes.

As a listener one should watch for the non-verbal meanings (body language). These can include the speaker's gestures, facial expressions, eyes, and posture. Non-verbal meanings as well as tone of voice can confirm or deny the message of the words. Good listeners make sure that they have all of the key information before forming an opinion. They do not jump to conclusions based on incomplete information.

Good listening does not mean automatic agreement. They may agree or disagree with the speaker. A good listener will get all of the facts and evidence and analyze them before reaching a final decision and making a judgment. The listener must also let the speaker know of a verbal or non-verbal response to what was heard and how it was heard. Good listeners have a strong desire to reach a common understanding. Confident responses inform the speaker that:

1. The message was heard
2. It was understood
3. It was evaluated appropriately

To be an effective leader one must be constantly working to be an even better listener who inspires the confidence of others.



"Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care, for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill."



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