

How to Truly Listen

True listening engages not only your ears and mind, but also your eyes and heart

TRUE LISTENING ENCOMPASSES ALL THERE IS about effective listening, and augments professional discourse with a human touch. Effective listening hears the words; true listening hears the person. Effective listening employs your ears and mind; true listening engages your eyes and heart. Effective listening understands the message; true listening transcends the message and gains profound insight.

Taken together, effective listening and true listening deeply enhance your relationships.



True listening means seeing beyond the words, engendering trust, and establishing an emotional personal connection.

See beyond the words. The nonverbal part of communication often expresses more than the actual words themselves. To truly listen, engage all your senses.

As you hear someone talk and begin to understand the concept, look for the emotion, passion, and feeling of the words to truly understand the depth of the message. Instead of just asking questions to better comprehend, recognize and articulate these emotions and feelings. Many times the person talking doesn't even realize how emotionally involved they are.

Body language speaks. Watch the talker's facial expressions and their overall physical behavior. Picture this: you are sitting on a park bench watching two people, out of earshot, converse. One's head drops slightly, the other moves a bit closer, touches the first's forearm, then slowly slides their arm up to almost the

shoulder. The first looks up into the other's eyes and smiles; the smile is returned. Think they're talking about the stock market? The latest sports scores? Having an argument? Being encouraging?

Observe the tone of voice. Consider the personality of words. How words are said can be more enlightening than their actual meaning. Yes. Yeeees... Yes!

On the other hand, words have power. People choose certain words on purpose. Realize that you must look behind or between the meaning of the words being spoken. Nothing is said by accident. The subconscious wields enormous influence over one's thoughts and speech. "Freudian slips" might be professionally embarrassing and quickly explained away, but they always state a truth someone doesn't actually want to expose.

Engender trust. When someone knows that you are truly listening, they begin to trust you, are more candid, and delve deeper into their message. Aren't you fortunate! You are being taken into their confidence. It's just this confidence that enables someone to tell you the darkest secrets about a topic—it's important here to never shoot the messenger—information that you might not be able to attain any other way. This level of trust always takes time and a degree of personal commitment. In other words, engendering trust must become an integral part of your character.

Establish an emotional connection. Elevate a conversation beyond the words, to the person relaying these words. People are human, there are feelings involved. Regardless of what these feelings are, discover them and recognize them and appreciate them. Out loud.

Show you are truly listening. During any conversation or verbal discourse, there are hundreds of visual clues between the talker and the listener, all conveying a certain meaning. Often these clues are fleeting and almost invisible to the human eye. Just as often, these clues are readily apparent.

A talker receives these visual clues and adjusts to them as they talk. Negative clues

cause someone to work harder to get your attention, to curtail what they are saying due to perceived disinterest, or to stop talking entirely. Don't let that happen. Give positive clues: look at the person talking, smile, nod your head, lean forward, show you are thinking, show you are engaged.

Choose your silence. Of course you must be silent to allow someone else to talk, but what kind of silence are you exhibiting? Your silence can be demanding or receptive; it can be hard and steely or it can be soft and kind; it can be cold or warm. Or it can simply be neutral. How you are silent directly affects what you hear.

True listening in action. My friend Bill relates this conversation he had with a new friend, Cara. Bill was surprised to learn that Cara, sophisticated and city-raised, drove a pickup truck. Cara begins, "I lived in Central America for two years, and while I was there, my stepfather passed away. I wasn't notified in time and missed his funeral. When I returned to the states, my mother offered me his pickup truck." Ah, understanding.

"The truck loves me," Cara reveals. How? "It always brings me into the repair shop just before it has a problem." She continues, "The first time, the carburetor burst into flames while being looked at. If it hadn't brought me in, surely I would have lost the engine. The second time my truck took me it, the mechanic told me the brake line was severed and ready to split in two. Had my truck waited any longer, the brakes would have been lost."

Bill is thinking this truck is a rat-trap. But then he remembers to look between the words. He says to Cara, "Your stepfather must have really loved you, and you must miss him so much." 🍌

—RICH MAGGIANI

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