



The Secrets to Listening Well

"Listening is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well." - John Marshall

There must be a lot of frustrated people out there, a lot of people who feel like they aren't listened to, a lot of people throwing up their arms and saying, "You just don't get it, do you?" I say this because some of the most popular pages on The PAR Group's web site are on listening skills.

There seems to be a growing realization of the importance of solid listening and communication skills in business. After all, lack of attention and respectful listening can be costly - leading to mistakes, poor service, misaligned goals, wasted time and lack of teamwork.

This is why all of our coaching programs start with a foundation of listening skills. You can't sell unless you understand your customer's problem; you can't manage unless you understand your employee's motivation; and you can't gain team consensus unless you understand each team member's feelings about the issue at hand. In all of these cases, you must listen to others.

However, listening is less important than how you listen. By listening in a way that demonstrates understanding and respect, you cause rapport to develop, and that is the true foundation from which you can sell, manage or influence others.

"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen." - Ernest Hemingway

Following are some keys to listening well:

1. Give 100% Attention: Prove you care by suspending all other activities.
2. Respond: Responses can be both verbal and nonverbal (nods, expressing interest) but must prove you received the message, and more importantly, prove it had an impact on you. Speak at approximately the same energy level as the other person...then they'll know they really got through and don't have to keep repeating.
3. Prove understanding: To say "I understand" is not enough. People need some sort of evidence or proof of understanding. Prove your understanding by occasionally restating the gist of their idea or by asking a question which proves you know the main idea. The important point is not to repeat what they've said to prove you were listening, but to prove you understand. The difference in these two intentions transmits remarkably different messages when you are communicating.
4. Prove respect: Prove you take other views seriously. It seldom helps to tell people, "I appreciate your position" or "I know how you feel." You have to prove it by being willing to communicate with others at their level of understanding and attitude. We do this naturally by adjusting our tone of voice, rate of speech and choice of words to show that we are trying to imagine being where they are at the moment.

Listening to and acknowledging other people may seem deceptively simple, but doing it well, particularly when disagreements arise, takes true talent. As with any skill, listening well takes plenty of practice.

"I think one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention." - Diane Sawyer

Find out how you can become a better listener and a more effective communicator in the privacy of your own home or office. PAR's exclusive Virtual Classroom CD and your computer will enhance your existing listening skills and build powerful business communication skills that will assist in your professional development.