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Last Updated on October 22, 2020 How would you feel if you shared a personal story and noticed that the person you were talking to wasn't really listening? You probably won't be too happy. Unfortunately, that is the case for many. Most individuals are not good listeners. They are good pretenders. The thing is, true listening requires work—more work than people are willing to invest. Quality conversations are about giving and receiving. Most people, however, want to just give—their words, that is. Being on the receiving end because the listener may seem boring, but it's important. When you attend someone and pay attention to what they say, it's a sign of care and respect. The hitch is that attending requires action to be, which is sometimes at odds with what our minds do naturally—wandering aimlessly and thinking about the other, rather than listening—the greatest act of thought. Without active listening, people often feel inaudible and unappreciated. That's why it's important for everyone to learn how to be a better listener. What Makes a Poor Listener? Good listening skills can be learned, but first, let's take a look at some of the things you might do that make you a bad listener.1. You Want to Talk to YourselfWell, who doesn't? We all have something to say, right? But when you see someone pretending to listen for a while, all this time, they mentally plan all the amazing things they're going to say, it's an insult to the speaker. Yes, maybe what other people say is not the most interesting thing in the world. However, they deserve to be heard. You always have the ability to point the conversation the other way by asking questions. It's okay to want to talk. That's normal, even. Keep in mind, however, that when your turn doesn't come around, you'll want someone to listen to you.2. You Don't Agree With What You're Saying This is another thing that makes you an inadequate listener—hear something you disagree with and immediately tune out. Then, you lie waiting so you can tell the speaker how wrong they are. You want to make your point and prove the speaker wrong. You think that once you speak your truth, others will know how wrong the speaker is, thank you for straightening them out, and encourage you to decipher what you said. Dream. Disagree with your speakers, however frustrating that may be, is no reason to tune them out and be ready to spew out your surprise rebuttal. By listening, you may actually nudge some interesting information that you were not previously aware of.3. You Do Five Other Things While You Listen It's impossible to listen to someone while you're texting, reading, playing Sudoku, etc. But people do it all the time—I know I have. I'm really trying to balance my checkbook while pretending to listen to people on the other side. It didn't work. I have to keep asking, what are you doing? I can only admit this now because I rarely do it again. With the work, I have managed to become a better listener. It takes a lot of concentration, but it's certainly worth it. If you're really going to listen, then you should: listen! M. Scott Peck, M.D., in his book *The Road Less Travelled*, says, you can't really listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time. If you're too busy to actually listen, let the speaker know, and set another time to speak. It's as simple as that.4. You appoint yourself as the Wrong Judge you listen to, you decide that the speaker doesn't know what they're talking about. As an expert, you know more. So, what's the point of even listening? For you, the only sound you hear after you decide they're wrong is, Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah! But before you bang that gavel, just know you may not have all the necessary information. To do that, you have to really listen, don't you? Also, make sure you don't judge someone by their accent, the way they sound, or their sentence structure. My father is almost 91 years old. His English is sometimes a little broken and difficult to understand. People wrongly assume that he doesn't know what he's talking about—they're quite wrong. My father was a very intelligent man who had English as his second language. He knows what he says and understands language perfectly. Remember that when listening to a stranger, or someone who may have trouble putting their thoughts into words. Now, you know some of the things that keep listeners low. If none of the above items resonate with you, great! You're a better listener than most. How to Be a Better ListenerFor sake conversations, though, let's say maybe you need some work in the listening department, and after reading this article, you make the decision to improve. What, then, are some of the things you need to do to make it happen? How can you be a better listener?1. Pay attention to a good attentive listener. They don't look at watches, phones, or think about their dinner plans. They focus and pay attention to what others are saying. It's called active listening. According to Skills You Need, active listening involves listening with all senses. In addition to paying full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'visible' to listening—otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is not of interest to the listener. As I mentioned, it's normal for the mind to wander around. After all, we're human beings. But good listeners will hold those thoughts back as soon as they see their attention fade. want to note here that you can also listen to body cues. You can assume that if someone keeps looking at their watch or over their shoulder, their focus isn't on the conversation. The key is to pay attention.2. Use Body Language PositivityYou can infer a lot from a person's body language. Are they interested, bored, bored, Anxious? Good listener body language is open. They lean forward and express curiosity in what is said. Their facial expressions smile, show concern, convey empathy, etc. They let the speakers know that they were being heard. People say things for a reason—they want some kind of feedback. For example, you tell your partner, I'm having a really tough day! and your husband keeps checking his newsfeed while nodding his head. Not a good response. But what if your husband looks up with his eyes in question, puts down his phone, and says, Oh, no. What's going on? How are you feeling? The answer is clear. According to Alan Gurney, An active listener pays close attention to the speaker and ensures they understand the information conveyed. You can't be distracted by incoming calls or Facebook status updates. You have to be present and at this point. Body language is an important tool to make sure you do this. Correct body language makes you a better active listener and therefore more 'open' and accepts what the speaker says. At the same time, it shows that you listen to them. 3. Avoid Interrupting speakers! I'm sure you don't want to be in the middle of a sentence just to see someone else holding their finger or mouth open, ready to step into your unfinished verbiage. It's rude and causes anxiety. You will, more than likely, feel the need to rush what you say just to finish your sentence. Disturbing is a sign of disrespect. It's basically saying, what I have to say is much more important than what you say. When you annoy speakers, they feel frustrated, rushed, and insane. Interrupting speakers to agree, disagree, argue, etc., causes speakers to lose track of what they say. It's very frustrating. Anything you say can wait until someone else is done. Be polite and wait your turn.4. Ask QuestionsAsking is one of the best ways to show that you're interested. If someone tells you about their ski trip to Mammoth, don't respond with, that's great. It will show a lack of interest and disrespect. Instead, you can ask, how long have you been skiing? Do you find it hard to learn? What's your favorite part of the trip? Etc. That person will think of you very much and consider you a great conversation with just a few questions.5. Just listen. When you're negotiating with someone, it's usually back and forth. Sometimes, all it takes from you is to listen, smile, or nod your head, and your speakers will feel like they really are and understood. I once sat with a client for 45 minutes without saying a word. He came to my office in distress. I made him sit down, and then he started crying softly. I sat with him—that's all I did. At the end of the session, he stood up, told me he felt much better, and then left. I must admit that 45 minutes without a difficult word. But he doesn't need me to say anything. He needs a safe space where he can emote without interruption, judgment, or I'm trying to fix something.6. Remember and Follow UpPart being a great listener is to remember what the speaker has told you, then follow up. For example, in your recent conversation with your co-worker Jacob, he told you that his wife had gotten a promotion and that they were contemplating moving to New York. Next time you meet Jacob, you might want to say, Hey, Jacob! What happened to your wife's promotion? At this point, Jacob will know you actually heard what he said and that you are interested to see how things turn out. What a gift! According to new research, people who ask questions, especially follow-up questions, may be better managers, better jobs, and even win a second date. It's easy to show your concern. Just remember some facts and follow up. If you do this regularly, you'll make more friends.7. Keep Confidential Confidential InformationIf you really want to be a better listener, listen carefully. If what you hear is confidential, keep it that way, no matter how tempting it is to tell others, especially if you have the same friends. Being a good listener means being trustworthy and sensitive with shared information. Anything told to you in confidence cannot be expressed. Make sure your speakers are safe with you. They will feel relieved that they have someone with whom they can share their burden without fear of going out. Maintaining someone's confidence helps deepen your relationship. Also, one of the most important elements of confidentiality is to help build and develop trust. This potentially allows for a free flow of information between clients and workers and recognizes that the client's personal life and all the problems and problems they have are theirs. Be like a therapist: listen and withhold judgment. NOTE: I have to add here that while the therapist keeps everything in a secret session, there is an exception: If the client may be a direct danger to himself or others. If the client endangers a population that cannot protect itself, such as in the case of child or elder abuse. 8. Maintain Eye ContactWhen someone speaks, they usually say something they consider meaningful. They don't want their listeners reading text, looking at their nails, or bending over to pet a dog in the street. A speaker wants all eyes on them. This lets them know that what they say has value. Eye contact is very important. It can convey many things without anything being said. Today, it is more important than ever with the Covid-19 Pandemic. People can't see your whole face, but they can definitely read your eyes. With eye contact, I don't mean a hard, creepy stare—just a stare at the speaker to do. Make it a point next time you're in to maintain eye contact with your speakers. Avoid the temptation to look anywhere except on their faces. I know it's not easy, especially if you're not interested in what they're talking about. But as I said, you can steer the conversation in a different direction or just let that person know you have to go. Final ThoughtsListening will attentively add to your relationship with anyone in your life. Now, more than ever, when people are so disconnected because of smartphones and social media, listening skills are essential. You can build better, more honest, and deeper relationships just by being there, paying attention, and asking questions that make speakers feel like what they're saying is important. And isn't that a good goal? To make people feel as if they matter? So, go out and start honing your listening skills. Your ears are good. Now use them! More Tips on How to Be a Better ListenerFeatured photo credit: Joshua Rodriguez via unsplash.com unsplash.com