

Listening

***Yose ben Yochanan of Jerusalem said:
"One who speaks without attention
and uses words without care
speaks shallowly, listens poorly, gives bad advice,
and falls easily into gossip."***

Pirke Avot 1:5

- How would you describe someone who "speaks without attention" or "listens poorly"?
- How might Rabbi Yose comment on the popular phrase "I hear you"?

For listening to occur, there are four steps: hearing, understanding, evaluating, and reacting. A good listener learns to adapt these steps into basic conversation.

Concern should also be shown for the environment in which the conversation takes place so that listening will be more effective.

Easily 80% of our volunteer activities depends on good listening. Understanding, without distortion, determines the success of various tasks, as well as the feeling generated in those with whom we work.

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1. **Acceptance**—Acknowledge that you are listening.
2. **Reflection**—Repeat the speaker's words.
3. **Clarification**—Ask for meaning or further explanation.
4. **Interpretation**—Absorb what has been said and reword it.
5. **Summary**—Tie up what has been said to conclude.

**Five
Components
of Good
Listening**

Active Listening

Active listening is understanding without judging. It is more than listening to the content of the message. It is also trying to understand what is behind the content.

It is helpful to try to understand the feelings of our co-workers. Encourage them to describe their feelings with "I" messages such as: I feel used, I feel inadequate for the job, I feel overlooked. Send feedback and attempt to rephrase what was heard to see if you have absorbed the intended meaning. For example: You seem upset. How would you have preferred it be handled?

As a listener, your reaction to the speaker can greatly affect communication. It is a bit unfair to say, "She is boring," when you more honestly mean, "I find her boring." Your own attitude plays a great part in what you say and what you hear.

Facial Expressions

Of all the ways a listener can encourage openness and a feeling of acceptance, the most important is facial expression. The way people say things, the tone of voice, the expression, account for about a third of what the other person perceives. I've thoroughly enjoyed working with one president because she makes my every idea sound like the best thing the group has ever considered. She does it more with expression, tone and inflection than choice of words. A person's facial expression should help communicate that she really wants to hear what the other person has to say.

Inferences

Because one's behavior says so much, learn to become aware of what kinds of inferences others make from it. Remember, you will not see or hear the same events or words in precisely the same way as anyone else. Differences due to perception, motivation, expectation, and personal bias affect a person's observations and inferences.

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Misconceptions about Listening

There are a number of misconceptions about good listening. Some believe good listening depends largely on intelligence, and that in learning to read, people will automatically learn to listen. A good listener applies specific skills acquired through training or experience. If these have not been acquired, the ability to understand and retain what is heard will be low. This can happen whether people have high or low intelligence.

While some of the skills needed for good reading apply to good listening, the assumption that one goes with the other is invalid. Listening and reading are very different activities.

It is easier to concentrate while reading or watching something than while listening because distractions register more easily when listening. The mind is open to process hundreds of words and other factors in addition to the things we hear. The average listener remembers only 25% of what was said. Within eight hours she forgets nearly one half of that! People forget more in the first few hours than they do in the next six months.

The basic problem with listening is that people think much faster than they talk. While listening, they must receive words at an extremely slow pace compared with the ability to process. When listening, people still have spare time for thinking. The idea is to direct this thinking to the message being received.

To really listen, learn how to use the spare thinking time more effectively. Learn to direct a maximum amount of thought to the message being received. This leaves little time for mental side-tracking away from the speaker's message.

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1. Listen ahead of the speaker; prepare for the direction of thought.
2. Weigh the evidence of the speaker, but withhold judgment.
3. Periodically review and mentally summarize the points.
4. Listen between the lines for additional meaning.

Remember, facts are for constructing ideas. Grouping ideas is what good listening is all about. Use the facts only long enough to understand the ideas that are built from them.

Listening ability is also affected by emotions. Refrain from judgmental listening. Be open to new ideas or perspectives.

When possible, write down what you are hearing. Approximately 85% of what comes into the brain is through the eyes, only 11% through the ears. Taking notes can help a person to hear with more accuracy. Write down highlights and key points.

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*misconceptions about
listening continued*

Basic Problem

Four Productive Listening Activities

Ladder for Successful Listening

There are many things a person can do to become a better listener. Below is a **LADDER FOR SUCCESSFUL LISTENING** to use as a guide.

- L** Look at the speaker, show an active interest. When the eyes are elsewhere, so is the mind.
- A** Ask questions. Closed-end questions: who, what, when, where, reveal specific facts. Open-ended questions draw the other person out: Why? How?
- D** Don't interrupt! It is as rude to step on ideas as toes.
- D** Don't change the subject. Interrupting is bad enough, but changing the subject compounds the error.
- E** Emotions. These can interfere with real communication.
- R** Responsiveness means being responsive to demeanor, posture, facial expression and tone of voice.

For real listening, learn to **Hear**:

Hear

- H** Have a hearing check. You may not be aware of a slight hearing loss.
- E** Evaluate the evidence of the speaker for concrete support of the ideas.
- A** Anticipate the point of the communication and the direction.
- R** Review the key points mentally and summarize what you heard.

Listening is a process of decoding one message and reassembling it. It is based on previous knowledge. For this reason it is as important to listen for concepts, as much as for content. All words are absorbed through an emotional filter. People tend to turn off what they don't want to hear.

For this reason, it is important to market ideas for the specific audience. Think consciously about what they want to hear and how to make each point more appealing.

Thinking and resistance drop to a minimum when people are listening to ideas that support basic feelings. Mental barriers are dropped and everything is welcomed. Your challenge as a speaker

is to create the kind of environment in which the listener will be receptive to other ideas. As a listener, tune in to your speaker with empathy and you will hear more. Time invested in the environment is worth every minute.

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At least five factors inhibit good listening, including:

- Feeling that a decision must be made about what is presented.
- Evaluating what is presented, judging.
- Being hurried and listening on the run.
- Hearing only what you want to hear.
- Interrupting because you have something to say.

Response styles lie at the heart of effective listening. They can act as facilitators of communication, or as inhibitors. Interpersonal communication is a process of give and take. Whenever a person communicates something to you, the way you respond has the potential to direct the course of the ensuing message.

At one time or another one of the following responses may be appropriate, or at least expedient.

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| ■ advice | ■ giving reassurance |
| ■ interpretation | ■ paraphrasing |
| ■ cross-examination | |

If the purpose of your communication is to share feelings, then realize that the first four of these act as inhibitors. With paraphrasing the intention is to find out whether what you heard is what the speaker intended. This response lets the other person know you are sensitive on the *feeling* level.

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How a person listens is inevitably affected by her thinking style.

To be a responsible, successful communicator, focus on the other person. How does she process information? Will she listen better if you choose words that create a picture or words that relate to

*ladder for successful
listening continued*

Blocks to Good Listening

Response Styles

Thinking Styles

*thinking styles
continued*

feelings? What is her thinking style? Listening improves in others when the speaker is sensitive to the values and needs of the listener, as well as to her thinking style. Remember to show concern for whether she is left-brained (logical and analytical) or right-brained (creative and intuitive).

To be a responsible, successful listener, focus on the other person. Learn to empathize. Project yourself into the situation of the other person and experience the sensation believed to be a part of it. How does the other person process information? How does she think?

Ten Commandments For Good Listening

- 1. Stop talking!**
You cannot listen if you are talking.
- 2. Put the speaker at ease.**
Help her feel that she is free to talk.
- 3. Show others you want to listen.**
Look and act interested. Don't busy yourself with other things.
Listen to understand rather than oppose.
- 4. Remove distractions.**
Don't doodle, tap or shuffle papers. Would it be quieter if you shut the door?
- 5. Empathize with others.**
Put yourself in their place so as to see their point of view.
- 6. Be patient.**
Allow plenty of time. Do not interrupt. Avoid heading for the door.
- 7. Hold your temper.**
An angry person gets the wrong meaning from words.
- 8. Avoid arguments and criticism.**
These put others on the defensive. They may 'clam up' or become angry.
Do not argue. Even if you win, you lose.
- 9. Ask questions.**
This is encouraging and shows that you are listening.
It helps develop points and is essential for clarification.
- 10. Stop talking!**
This is both first and last, because all the other commandments depend on it.
You simply cannot be a listening if you are talking.

Listening I.Q.

This inventory provides an assessment of your current listening skills and habits.

Do You	SELDOM 1	USUALLY 3	ALWAYS 5
1. Give the speaker your full and undivided attention?			
2. Listen for key words and underlying feelings?			
3. Avoid pre-judging the value of the words until you have heard the speaker finish?			
4. Wait until the speaker has completed her thought before sharing yours?			
5. Look for body language messages as well as word messages?			
6. Steer clear of needing the last word?			
7. Make a conscious effort to consider and question the logic and credibility of what you hear?			
8. Ask for clarification when the words of the speaker are confusing to you?			
9. Use <i>active-listening</i> techniques, such as paraphrasing?			
10. Attempt to remember the significant points of the speaker's message.			
TOTAL			

50 is a perfect score.

Less than 40 indicates a need for more work learning listening skills.