

10 Tips for Improving Your Listening

Listening to Staff, Volunteers and Clients

Check and Connect National Conference

McNamara Alumni Center

University of Minnesota

Richard Krueger
Professor Emeritus
October 7, 2015

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Listening is interactive

What the listener does influences the speaker

Consider: How do you listen to a child?

- Get on same level
- Be expressive with your face and body

Tip 1

Get ready to listen

- We get trapped in our promoting, presenting, teaching mode
- Move to a receiving mode
- Get yourself physically and mentally ready
- Be non-judgmental
- Look like you are listening
- “The biggest communications problem is that we don’t listen to understand. We listen to reply.”

The meditation of Jack Kornfield

Picture or imagine that this earth is filled with Buddhas, that every single being you encounter is enlightened, except one - yourself! Imagine that they are all here to teach you. Whoever you encounter is acting as they do solely for your benefit, to provide just the teachings and difficulties you need in order to awaken. Sense what lessons they offer to you. Inwardly thank them for this. Throughout a day or a week continue to develop the image of enlightened teachers all around you.

Tip 2

Manage distractions

- Monitor your body language and facial expressions
- Use eye contact
- Don't interrupt
- Ditch the distractions (cell phones, etc.)

Tip 3

Develop a plan to listen

A plan for formal and informal listening

- Formal listening – Prearranged situations when people share insights
- Informal listening – Unplanned encounters with those around you

Formal listening

Possibilities include:

- Small focus groups
- Periodic staff meetings with staff reporting on listening
- Office hours with specified times for listening

Informal listening

- Be deliberate - Set aside time when listening is top priority
- Slow down - hard to listen when you are rushed
- Listen while you walk around, when someone comes to you, before and after meetings, etc.

Tip 4

Find the right place

- Location makes a difference
- Be ready to move to a more suitable setting
- A place where the other person feels comfortable
- Quiet, uninterrupted
- Shut off electronics – Put your phone away
- Spectators and observers change the environment

Tip 5

Capture the comments

How will you remember?

- Use memory followed by field notes
- Field notes during the conversation
- Digital audio recorder for focus groups

Tip 6

Use pauses and probes

- Probe: ask for an example, an explanation, or more information
- 5- or 10- second pause

Tip 7

Have a few standard questions

- What can we do to make it better?
- What's the first thing that should be done?
- How can I help you(be more productive, achieve your goals, be better at what you do, etc.)
- If you were making the decision what would you do?
- What should happen next?
- Who can give me more information?

Tip 8

Don't get defensive

- This is their chance to talk, your job is to listen
- Don't take it personally
- Consider: Does the person want an explanation, a solution or do they just want to be heard?
- Be ready to say, "I'm sorry"

Tip 9

Listening when emotions are intense

- Be ready to receive emotional comments
- Give full attention – Stop doing other things
- Eye contact is important
- Help them keep their dignity. Keep it private and confidential
- Don't rush
- Respond in a simple and comforting way — “I’m sorry” or “This is a horrible situation”
- The trigger may be somewhere else. The factors cited may be one of several factors producing the emotional response
- Be ready to call in reinforcements
- Hesitate before sharing your emotional story
- Offer to stay in touch until the problem is resolved – follow up

Tip 10

Listening follow-up

- Consider follow-up steps in certain situations
- Check in later with the person who shared
- Let them know what action has occurred
- Let them know that you are still thinking about it
- Repeat back a key phrase or example at a later time
- Thank them for sharing

10 Tips for listening

1. Get ready to listen
2. Manage the distractions
3. Develop a plan to listen
4. Find the right place
5. Capture the comments
6. Use pauses and probes
7. Have a few standard questions
8. Don't get defensive
9. Listening when emotions are intense
10. Listening follow-up