



How Listening Skills Boost Your Influence at Work



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How many of you consider yourselves to be good listeners? On the face of it, listening may seem simple.

After all, anyone with functional ears can listen to what another is saying, right?

However, active and effective listening is not so simple.

How many times have you been in a serious conversation with someone, only to notice that they are not paying much attention to what you were saying?

Either they were replying to emails during the conversation, texting on their phone, constantly asking you to repeat something you said, or interrupting you before you were done putting your point across.


How did this make you feel? Would you say that person is a great listener?

If you are anything like me, I'd bet that you were totally put off by their poor listening skills.

As a leader, you play a very important role within your organization. You are in charge of shaping the organization's goals, decisions and priorities.

Beyond that, you also need to use your influence to shape your [company culture](#), commitment, employee engagement and loyalty.





You also need to gain the credibility and trust of those below and above you in order to become even more influential.

To do all these, you need to have excellent communication skills, a huge part of which depends on your ability to listen.

This explains why more and more entrepreneurs and business leaders are putting a lot of emphasis on their listening skills.

They understand that if they want to become more influential within their organizations, they need to stop talking and start listening.

This is no surprise since a large part of influencing others depends so much on how well you understand these people and their motivations.

Listening is so important that it has been listed by the [US Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills](#) as one of the three critical foundation skills and one of the five key competencies that anyone getting into the workforce needs to have.

Listening is also one of the [top skills being sought by employers](#), and is often associated with the ability to lead, which means those with great listening skills have a higher chance of being promoted into leadership positions.

Finally, being a great listener has been listed in [Dale Carnegie's](#) bestselling book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People* as one of the most effective techniques for increasing your influence and likeability.

Not convinced yet?

Below are some ways in which listening helps you become more influential at work.


HELPS YOU BUILD DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS

To be influential, you need to be able to create meaningful relationships with people and to connect with them on a deeper level.

To do this, you should be able to understand them, make them feel heard and empathize with them, which is impossible if you are not a good listener.

Being ready to give others a listening ear and giving them the space to communicate fully and openly increases the likelihood that they will come to you when they are facing challenges or when they have new ideas.





According to a [2003 study conducted by Faye Doell](#), a psychologist from York University, people who listen not just to hear but to understand tend to have deeper, happier and more meaningful relationships with others.

EARN THE RESPECT AND TRUST OF YOUR COLLEAGUES

Your influence also depends on how much other people respect you and the trust they have in you.

If someone you do not respect or trust asked you to do something, would you do it?

Probably not. Listening plays a huge role in cultivating trust and earning the respect of your colleagues.

The workplace is very often a stress and pressure-filled environment, and showing your colleagues that you are willing to listen to them, understand what they are going through and help where you can makes them trust and respect you and makes them feel valued.

IT ILLUSTRATES THAT YOU CARE

Very often, some leaders treat their staff as robots whose only role is to make sure that company targets are met.

They don't value their staff as human beings with a personal life and feelings.

They only bellow out instructions without taking a moment to listen to anything their staff have to say.

The problem with this approach is that the employees end up despising such leaders, which in turn reduces their influence.

To be an influential leader, you need to demonstrate a caring attitude towards your staff.

You need to show that you value them as people, not as mindless droids with no value beyond the work they are doing for the organization.

Listening to your employees' feedback and concerns shows that you care for their wellbeing, which in turn motivates them to work hard to meet the organization's goals and objectives.

HELPS IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY



Listening plays a very important role in improving [workplace productivity](#).

Cultivating an [open-door policy](#) and showing your employees that you are always ready to listen to them creates an environment where employees are comfortable coming to you with their ideas on how best to accomplish tasks, which in turn leads to faster accomplishment of tasks and better results.

An environment where workers feel free to voice their opinions and ideas and get heard also helps [boost employee morale](#) and motivation, which can do wonders for the productivity of the whole organization. Finally, making your employees feel heard reduces the risk of losing them.

When employees feel like they are not being listened to, they are more likely to resent their jobs and start looking for other opportunities.

Making employees feel heard not only prevents the loss in productivity resulting from employee turnover, it also saves you from the [costs associated with hiring and onboarding new employees](#).

HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND ISSUES BETTER AND COME UP WITH BETTER SOLUTIONS

Business leaders who actively listen to their colleagues and staff have a better understanding of any issues their organization or department might be facing.

Through active listening, they are able to gather all the information they can about a specific challenge, which in turn allows them to come up with the best and most optimal solutions to these problems.

When you listen with a distracted mind, you miss some of the information being passed, forcing you to make decisions with gaps in your knowledge, which increases your chances of making an incorrect decision.


This is why your listening needs to be active – you need to be physical and mentally present, free of any distractions, in order to ensure that you have missed nothing.

HELPS YOU DIFFUSE CONFLICTS

The workplace brings together a diverse range of people with different personalities, different opinions and different methods of doing things.

In such a place, it is inevitable that sometimes conflicts will arise.





As an influential person within the organization, you will be required to handle and resolve some of these conflicts.

In order to effectively resolve these conflicts, you need to demonstrate active listening.

You need to actively listen to and understand the concerns and perspectives of both parties.

Sometimes, you might not agree with some of their opinions, but you need to give them the space to express themselves and feel heard.

When the parties involved in the conflict feel that their concerns are being heard, understood and taken seriously, there is a higher chance of coming up with a lasting solution, even when some of their needs are not met.

What matters is making sure that they are getting heard.

Showing that you are ready to listen to aggrieved parties and help them resolve issues also creates an environment where workers can speak openly about conflict, instead of bottling their issues and growing resentment towards each other, which can easily dampen overall employee morale.

HELPS YOU INCREASE YOUR EXPERTISE

Today's business environment is very dynamic.

Each industry has numerous areas of specialization, and it is almost impossible for any one person to know every aspect of the business.

In order to perform effectively and optimally, smart and influential business leaders know that it is important to tap into the knowledge and experience of others in order to strengthen their own knowledge and expertise.

They understand that it is important for them to cooperate with others in order to achieve the best results.

To do this, one needs to be able to listen to and learn from others.

Without great listening skills, the opportunity to cooperate with others and draw from their knowledge and expertise goes out the window.

HOW TO LISTEN ACTIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY



We have already seen that developing excellent listening skills is important for anyone trying to boost their influence at work.

The question is, how does one become a good listener?

Being a good listener is a lot more than sitting in front of someone as they talk.

It requires one to actually pay attention to what is being said, without letting other activities or thoughts take away from the message being passed.

It requires one to totally understand what is being said.

For instance, if an engineer went to the HR manager and talked to her in technical lingo, the HR manager might hear everything but still not understand a word of what was said, which means that she wasn't actually listening.

Active listening requires you to seek clarification whenever you feel you are not getting whatever is being said.

Active listening also requires one to make the other person feel heard – they need to know that their message has been understood and taken seriously.

While it often seems like an easy thing, effective listening is not a skill that comes naturally to many people.

Fortunately, the skill can be learned with adequate practice.

Below are some tips on how to become an active and effective listener and thereby boost your influence at work:

1. Get Rid of All Distractions

Many of us believe that we can perfectly do several things at the same time. In truth, we are very poor at multitasking.

When you try doing two things at the same time, you might think that you are multi-tasking, but what is actually happening is that your brain is engaged in something known as [rapid task-switching](#).

This means that instead of paying attention to both things simultaneously, your brain pays attention to one task and then rapidly switches the attention to the other task.


Have you ever tried texting while watching a movie?

You might realize that in the moment you are replying to the text, you miss a part of the movie.

This shows that your attention has been switched from the movie to the text.

During conversations, many of us think we can multitask.





We try to listen to the other person as we reply to a text or email or as we work on something on the computer.

We think we are multi-tasking, but as we have seen, that is impossible.

Therefore, when you do something else while listening to someone, your attention is rapidly flipping between listening to the person and the task you are doing.

Under such circumstances, it is inevitable that you will miss bits of what the person is saying.

To prevent this, you should get rid of all potential distractions during a conversation.

If you were working on something, put it on hold or ask the person to come later if you cannot put the work on hold.

Perhaps the biggest source of distractions during conversations is the cell phone.

Very often, we are tempted to glance at or grab our phones the moment a notification chimes on the phone, which takes our attention from the conversation.

To prevent this, put away your phone and focus all your energy on the conversation.

This shows the other person that all your attention is focused on what they want to say.

2. Face the Speaker and Maintain Eye Contact

Have you ever talked to someone who was looking everywhere except at you?

They were either looking at their phone, their computer, the TV, a magazine, out the window, or even at the wall.

Do you think the person was attentive to what you were saying?

Looking elsewhere while a person is talking to you means that you are not giving them your undivided attention.

It shows that you are paying more attention to what you are looking at than to what the person is saying.

If you want someone to feel that you are actually paying attention to what they are saying, you should always face them and maintain eye contact.

This shows that you are giving whatever the person is saying the importance it deserves.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you should keep staring at the person without shifting your gaze even for a moment.

This will only make you look creepy. It is okay to shift your gaze and look at other things in your surroundings from time to time, but make sure that you look at them for most of the time.



3. Be Mentally Present

Someone might get rid of all physical distractions such as phones and notebooks, face you and maintain eye contact with you as you speak, but still miss bits of what you are saying.

Ever found yourself in such situations?

Why do they miss what you are saying when they are seemingly paying attention to you?

In most cases, this happens because the person is not mentally present in the conversation.

As you talk, a multitude of thoughts might be running through the person's mind, making it impossible for them to give you their undivided attention.

To be an effective listener, you need to be mentally present during conversations.

Don't use the conversation as an opportunity for you to think about your upcoming projects or unpaid bills or your objectives for the month.

Clear your mind of these thoughts and focus solely on whatever is being said.

A great way to achieve this clarity of mind is to set aside some time every day, say 30 minutes, to think about and reflect on any important things that might be on your mind.

Creating a time of solitude and reflection clears your mind and allows you to focus on other things, including conversations, without being distracted by your internal dialogues.

Another thing that keeps people from being mentally present in a conversation is listening to reply.

How many times have you found yourself preparing how you will reply once a person is done talking, while they are still talking?

Doing this takes your focus from what is being said to what you will say, and in so doing, it results in you missing out on some of what is being said.

To prevent this, learn to listen with the aim of understanding.


Make sure that you've clearly grasped the message the other person is trying to pass before thinking of how you will reply.

After all, it is easier to give an appropriate response after you have properly understood what is being said.

4. Keep an Open Mind

When listening to someone, especially when the conversation involves a serious matter, there is always the temptation to mentally judge or criticize whatever the other person is saying. You might start telling yourself things like "*Well, that was stupid move*" or "*why didn't she think of ABC*" or "*you should have called me first,*" and so on.





The moment you allow such judgments or criticisms to creep into your mind, you have compromised your effectiveness as a listener.

To be an effective listener, you should learn to listen with an open mind, free of any judgments.

The aim of effective listening is to see the world through the other person's eyes, to understand their line of thought.

It is impossible to do this when you have already formed judgments inside your mind.

This does not mean that you should believe what they believe or agree with them.

Instead, you should just listen without passing any judgment. Your only aim should be to understand the other person.

5. Don't Interrupt

During conversations, sometimes we feel the urge to interrupt when someone is talking.

Sometimes, you might be in disagreement with what the person is saying, and you therefore interject in order to challenge what they are saying.

Sometimes, the interruption is well-intentioned.

You might interject to agree with something the other person said, to show empathy, or even to encourage them to go on speaking.

Regardless of the reason behind the interjection, it makes communication less effective and makes the other person feel like what they are saying does not matter.

In some cases, interrupting a person can even make them feel unheard.

To avoid this, avoid interrupting a person when they are speaking.

Listen quietly and wait until the speaker is done talking before expressing your thoughts, views or opinions.

6. Seek Clarification


Sometimes, due to differences in experiences, opinions, beliefs, and so on, the same thing can be interpreted differently by different people.

For instance, you might wish your colleague good luck before a challenging undertaking as a means of encouraging them and showing that you want the best for them.

Such an innocent phrase might be misconstrued by the colleague to mean that you think that they are not capable of handling the challenge without luck.

This happens a lot in conversation, where one party says something and the other party understands it totally differently.





To avoid such situations, you should get into the habit of seeking clarification whenever you think that something feels vague or whenever you feel that it can be interpreted in two different ways.

There are two main methods of seeking clarification. The first one is to repeat what the other person has said.

After they are done talking, paraphrase what they said and ask them if that is what they meant or if you have missed or misconstrued something.

The other method is to ask questions. If something is not clear or does not make sense to you, ask questions that require the other person to further elaborate what they said.

This not only ensures that you totally understand what the other person is saying, but also shows them that you are really concentrating on what they are saying.

7. Recognize the Contribution of Others

This is a commonly overlooked aspect of being a great and effective listener.

Great listeners have learnt the habit of thanking others for their contributions.

They know that there is a lot to be learnt from listening to others.

Even when they have themselves gained no actual value from the conversation (which is very hard), they know it's not always easy for the other person to step up and talk about whatever issues they discussed.

Because of this, great listeners always take the time to thank the other person for their time and input.

This makes them come across as more thoughtful and caring, which increases others respect for and trust in them, in turn making them even more influential.

Therefore, you should also cultivate the habit of thanking the other person for their energy and ideas.

WRAPPING UP

Brushing up on your listening skills is a subtle but very effective way of boosting your influence at the workplace.

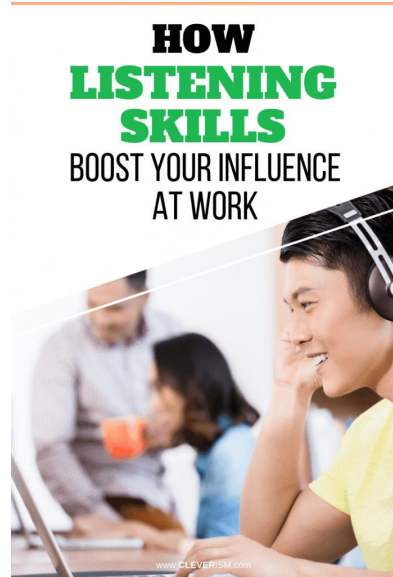
It sets you apart as a caring and thoughtful person, demonstrates your ability to lead and allows you to understand the intentions, feelings and motivations of your team.

Your colleagues learn to trust and respect you, which can go a long way in cementing your influence.



We have shared above some great tips that will make you a better listener.

Start implementing them in your conversations from today and watch as your communication skills and your influence at work soar.



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