

Communication Skills: Lecture No. 12

Module 4

Lecture 3

LISTENING SKILLS



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Have You Heard?

Listening Skills

In the previous lectures of this module, you had learnt about the significance of effective listening, types of listeners, and barriers to listening.

In this final lecture of the module, you will learn about active listening techniques and the benefits of effective listening.

In this lecture, you will learn about —

Active Listening Techniques

Benefits of Effective Listening

ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

I strongly suggest that you follow the techniques below to equip yourself as an active listener.

TAKE NOTES

Whether you are attending a lecture in the classroom or a speech in an auditorium or you are interviewing someone, it is important to keep a note book for taking notes. Taking notes helps in concentrating. It keeps you alert and makes you focused on the message. It helps you to reflect on the lecture and reconstruct important parts of it. You should also take notes while you are on telephone conversation. You will miss important details (such as the time, venue of an appointment) if you do not take notes while talking to someone on phone.

LISTEN LIKE A MANAGER

Unlike hearing that functions at the level of entertainment, listening operates at management level. You *hear* to entertain yourself such as keeping something on the radio or television and simultaneously doing some monotonous work. However, you *manage* to listen, in the sense, you need to *plan, decide, organize, cohere, and categorize*. To be an active listener, you need to anticipate what you can expect from a lecture. For this, you need to do some homework as going to a library or browsing the web to get some basic inputs about the topic. If it is an interview, proper planning includes checking your recording system or camera, as well as deciding whether to use a camera stand or not. Once the talk is over, often you need to organize the ideas, bring them to a coherent whole, and make a report of it. Sometimes the report is worthy of publishing, even otherwise, you can keep the report on record for future reference.

BE SUPPORTIVE TO THE SPEAKER

Make all possible ways to be supportive to the speaker. Never nurture antipathy and negative thoughts of opposing the speaker. Such negativity, as has been explained in the previous lecture, can muddle your thinking and thwart your understanding. Conversely, you can encourage the speaker by affirmative nods, vibrant eye contact, appreciative smile, and enthusiastic facial expressions. When the speaker feels appreciated, s/he will deliver her best. So, it will be a win-win situation—the speaker leaves with the satisfaction of having given the best performance, and you cherish that you got the maximum benefit from the speaker.

DO NOT INTERRUPT THE SPEAKER

Some people are habituated to interrupt the speaker frequently. It could be due to their impatience or overenthusiasm. However, in reality, it only reveals the poor listening skills of the interrupter. Moreover, it is not in the decorum to ask questions before the lecture is delivered. Interrupting not only affects the speaker's flow of thought but also showcases one's rude and uncultured self.

DO NOT CHANGE THE TOPIC

Sometimes, you may not be interested in the topic of discussion. Or, it may be that the speaker knows other topics that you are interested in. Nonetheless, you should not manipulate the speaker to change the topic. Also, you should not divert the speaker by asking provoking questions on other topics. This might make the speaker insecure and harm the interests of many others who actually came prepared for listening to that particular topic.

DO NOT SEEK SELF ATTENTION

Do not seek self attention in any manner. People seek self attention verbally by asking controversial questions, often to the embarrassment of the speaker. People also seek attention by their nonverbal behaviour such as coughing, murmuring, letting the mobile ring with a peculiar tone, getting up, going out and coming back frequently. Often the knowledgeable and matured keep a low profile and sit somewhere on the back rows silently—learn humility from such people!

DO NOT DISMISS THE TOPIC

If somebody offers to talk on a topic, do not dismiss it even before listening to it fully. Do not ever discourage the speaker since you think the topic is irrelevant or uninteresting. There are excellent communicators who can even make the most boring topic on earth the most interesting. I have listened to lectures on grammar topics, which are supposed to be boring, but taught by some excellent teachers who made it really “glamorous” (the route meaning of grammar!).

AVOID MULTITASKING



Once you have decided to listen to something, give yourself wholeheartedly to the task. Make your mind, body, and soul engaged completely in the listening activity. Avoid reading newspaper, while checking messages on your mobile, and responding to e-mails on

your I-Pad and also appearing to show interest in the speech. Multitasking, while hampering your active listening, insults a passionately prepared speaker and dampens his/her enthusiasm.

ASK QUESTIONS

You should not sit idly even when the session is open for questions from the audience. Be prepared for this moment, especially while taking notes itself, identify questions to be asked at the end of the speech. Ask questions without any hesitation. Only by asking questions and seeking clarifications, you will gain conceptual clarity. At the same time, a good speaker welcomes questions since it gives an opportunity to cover up some significantly missed points in the talk. Further, your thought-provoking questions may spur the speaker to delve deep into his/her research area. Your questions will make the speaker connected with you and can sometimes help in developing a wonderful relationship for future.



ASK OPEN QUESTIONS

When you ask questions, do not ask closed questions such as the ones that need only “yes” or “no” for answers. Ask open questions that will make the speaker say more about the subject. For instance, do not ask: “Has this been going on for twenty years?” Ask: “How long has this been going on?” Continue further with “Why so?”, “Can you explain?”, “Please elaborate”, “How did you feel about the whole experience”, and so on.

KEEP SUMMARIZING

At transition points, keep summarizing, especially in conversations, discussions, and interviews which involve simultaneous interaction. You can wait for brief moments where your summarizing can help the speaker go further. These are moments when the speaker is stuck or is groping for the next line of thought. Your summarizing at this moment will reveal to

the speaker that you are closely following him/her. For example you can say: “So far you highlighted the benefits of modern technology, but are you sure that there are no harmful effects of modern technology?” This, obviously, will make the speaker continue with the next line on thought on harmful effects of modern technology.

REPEAT

When you *repeat* a word or phrase, you are indicating the person to go on. It also shows that you are reflecting or pondering over the ideas expressed. If someone says, “So it’s been a really weird experience,” you can keep the conversation alive just by repeating the phrase, “. . . weird experience.”

SEEK CLARIFICATION

When you do not follow the main drift of the talk, seek clarification. There is a difference between asking question and seeking clarification. Having understood the subject, you ask questions. But when you seek clarification, you admit that the idea is complex and you are not able to understand. And thus, you request the speaker to say more on the subject from a different angle. Good speakers will approach the same issue through a different perspective and make it interesting for you and easy to grasp the subject.

FOCUS ON MESSAGE

Sometimes, the speaker lacks panache, style and charisma to keep the audience spell-bound. On such occasions, active listeners focus on the message. They graciously overlook minor grammatical or pronunciation errors committed by the speaker. So, do not focus on any irregularities of the speaker. Focus on the content and show that you are genuinely interested in the subject. Make efforts to concentrate on the meaning and the positive intent in which the speaker is trying to share a complex concept with you.

SHOW CARE AND EMPATHY

Instead of ridiculing the speaker for silly mistakes, show care and empathy. Offer to help the speaker. I remember a talk in a conference in which an eminent speaker's transparencies flew away from the overhead projector. My spontaneous support to the speaker in quickly getting the transparencies rearranged helped me develop a lasting relationship with the speaker.

AVOID POSITIVE BIAS/INFLUENCE

In this information age, you are surrounded by media and constantly flooded with information. Nonetheless, you should be able to evaluate the accuracy, correctness and validity of a message, however positive it might sound at the outset. To illustrate this, I want you to read and evaluate the following message carefully:

Our leader had an unhappy childhood and little formal education. His father bitterly opposed his ambition to become an artist. Through self-education, he became the author of a book that became a national best seller. Obstacles do not discourage him. When others say, "It's impossible," he hurdles each barrier as it comes. He has built an active youth movement of selected young people. He is known throughout the world for his dynamic speeches. His closest associates say of him, "He accomplishes incredible deeds out of the passion of his will in order to create the kind of government he believes in."

How have you felt about this personality? Very great? Inspiring and charismatic leader? Influential author? Eminent politician? All such positive biases are possible! But, in reality—

The famous personality is . . .

Adolf Hitler!



Now you can obviously see that the piece is a very euphemistic eulogy on Hitler!

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Before concluding, I would like to recapitulate all the important points about effective listening and its benefits in the form of bullet points in the following slides.

Effective Listening

Pay complete attention.

Don't think ahead as to what you are going to say next.

Don't rehearse your own comments while the other is speaking.

Don't interrupt. Remain silent while the other person speaks.



Listen for feelings underneath words—and to the nuances in language.

Read the body language.

Keep an open mind—
don't judge immediately.

Encourage the speaker to continue—clarify what is being said, if necessary.

Benefits of effective listening

- Removes barriers between interpersonal communication
 - Minimizes miscommunication and wrong transactions
 - Saves time by efficient handling of business
 - Builds up trust and generates mutual respect
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- Effectively used to calm down, comfort and soothe people
 - Develops confidence and self-esteem
 - Facilitates productivity and accuracy
 - Helps in therapeutic relations
 - Keeps intact certain religious practices
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- Makes you much demanded in personal and professional situations
 - Complete professional tasks efficiently (e.g., 10 boxing gloves; “burn” the document)
 - Gives job satisfaction

ULTIMATELY—



Always Remember . . .

***We have been given two ears and but a single mouth
in order that we may hear more and talk less.***

-Zeno of Citium



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