

## Quick Guide: Don't just hear: listen!

How do you rate as a listener? Do you, for example, "tune out" because you find the speaker long winded? Or, unwittingly perhaps, display signs of impatience or irritation? Or maybe you turn a "deaf ear" to certain topics or subjects? If you do these (and more) regularly, you are losing vital cues to help you understand another's behaviours. Instead you are simply picking up sound waves.

So here are the **top ten tips** to help you listen actively:

1. **Stop talking** and allow time for listening. You cannot listen well if you are talking, interrupting or hijacking someone's speech.
2. **Resist the temptation** to sneak a peek at your emails or papers on your desk while someone is talking.
3. **Maintain eye contact** consistently and in a way that doesn't make them feel uncomfortable or look as though you're staring at the speaker.
4. **Use your whole body to listen!** All of these will send "I'm listening" signals: sit in a more relaxed and open way, lean towards them slightly, tilt your head to one side, nod your head appropriately and use listening noises like 'uh-huh' or 'mmm' to encourage your speaker.
5. **Listen with an open mind**, parking prejudgements or bias, and instead acknowledging to yourself the positive content and intent of the conversation.
6. **Try to put yourself in the speaker's position**, so you can empathise and make non-judgemental remarks eg 'what happened next?' or 'how did you feel about that?'. Ask yourself how you would feel or what you would do, if in that situation.
7. **Ask questions** to clarify what the speaker has said. This encourages them and shows you are listening. Be careful your questions don't change the subject or pull the conversation off track.
8. **If you feel the conversation has wandered**, use reflective statements to pull it back. For example 'You were saying that...' or 'Tell me more about ...'.
9. **Paraphrase the information** to check you have understood the speaker correctly. Then summarise (briefly) the key points, outcomes and any necessary actions.
10. **The more you put in, the more you get out.**

**Compiled by Des Whitehorn**