

Barriers to Listening

Listening is not easy and there are a number of obstacles that stand in the way of effective listening, both within and outside the workplace.

These barriers may be categorized as follows.

1. **Physiological Barriers:** - some people may have genuine hearing problems or deficiencies that prevent them from listening properly. It can be treated. Some people may have a problem in processing information or retaining information in the memory. For example, lack of concentration/interest.

2. **Physical Barriers:** - These are referred to as distractions in the environment such as the sound of an air conditioner, cigarette smoke, or an overheated room. They can interfere with the listening process. They could also be in the form of information overload. For example, if you are in a meeting with your manager and the phone rings and your mobile beeps at the same time to let you know that you have a message. It is very hard to listen carefully to what is being said. Arriving late for a speech, presentation or lecture. Therefore, unavailability of listeners. Speaker or listener being distracted by disturbances will also be coming into the physical barrier category.

3. **Attitudinal Barriers:** - pre-occupation with personal or work-related problems can make it difficult to focus one's attention completely on what the speaker is saying, even when what is being said is of very importance. Another common attitudinal barrier is egocentrism, or the belief that the person has more knowledge than the speaker, or that there is nothing new to learn from the speaker's ideas. People with this kind of close-minded attitude are very poor listeners.

4. **Wrong Assumptions:** - The success of communication depends on both the sender and receiver. It is wrong to assume that communication is the sole responsibility of the sender or the speaker and that listeners have no role to play. Such an assumption can be a big barrier to listening. For example, a brilliant speech or presentation, however well delivered, is wasted if the receiver is not listening.

at the other end. Listeners have as much responsibility as speakers to make the communication successful. The process should be made successful by paying attention seeking clarifications and giving feedback. Another example :Assuming that the speaker is going to give some unimportant information .or Pre-judgments about the speaker .

5. Cultural Barriers :- Accents can be barriers to listening, since they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. The problem of different accents arises not only between cultures, but also within a culture. For example, in a country like India where there is enormous cultural diversity, accents may differ even between regions states.

6. Gender Barriers :- communication research has shown that gender can be barrier to listening. Studies have revealed that men and women listen very differently and for different purposes. Women are more likely to listen for the emotion behind a speaker's words, when men listen more for the facts and the content.

7. Lack of Training :- Listening is not an inborn skill. People are not born good listeners. It is developed through practice and training. Lack of training in listening skills is an important barrier. In lack of training people do avoid listening to difficult, boring or complex information and selectively listen only to what is considered interesting.

8. Bad Listening Habits :- Most people are very average listeners who have developed poor listening habits that are hard to said and that act as barriers to listening. For example, some people have the habits of "faking" attention, or trying to look like a listeners, in order to impress the speaker and to assure him that they are paying attention. Others may tend to listen to each and every fact and, as a result, miss out the main point. For example Judging the speaker by his/her mannerisms, voice, appearance, accent, etc

How To Listen Effectively?

1. Stop Talking – Be Silent
2. Show Interest
3. Empathize
4. Ask Questions
5. Maintain Eye Contact
6. Take notes
7. Listen Creatively
8. Put Your Entirety
9. Send feedback
10. Avoid or eliminate distraction
11. Try to gather information about the topic to develop interest and familiarity.

Benefits of Effective Listening

The skill of effective listening benefits personal growth and development in the following ways:

- **Enhances productivity:**

When we do develop the habit of listening attentively and improve our concentration then definitely we will be able to do our work more efficiently. The skill of listening makes one a good resource too for various works as concentration level improves too.

- **Improves relations :**

Relationships are damaged by misunderstandings that can lead to unsatisfactory business transactions as well as hurt feelings in personal relationships. Excellent listening practices tell others that they are important, special, and what they have to say is valued. That is very attractive and contributes to strong relationships

- **Avoids conflicts:**

Listening attentively improves understanding level of a person. He/she will listen more and speak less which will automatically reduce the conflicts in his/her relationships. When people understand better they don't argue and so situation of conflicts will rarely occur.

- **Improves understanding: (Reduces Misunderstanding)**

Regardless of the clarity of written or spoken messages, the effective listener can prevent misunderstandings and salvage what otherwise might be a miscommunication by practicing active listening skills

- **Improves negotiation skills (Effective Communication):**

Clear and concise transmission of information is an important component of effective human interaction. Though the onus is often placed on presenting clear and concise written or spoken directions, the listener also bears a responsibility to hear and understand messages.

- **Adds to your Image & Personality: (Personal Growth)**

A person learns and grows by listening and understanding other viewpoints, differing ideas, and exploring conflicting viewpoints. Learning the skill of active and effective listening not only adds a tool to the personal development portfolio, but equips you to continue growing with tools for exploring new ideas.

Ways to improve Listening skill

Hearing and Listening are two different activity. Hearing is passive whereas Listening is active. Listening is a psychological process. It can therefore be improved by regular practice. Listening is a very helpful skill. Active listening is really an extension of the Golden Rule. Here are some of the tips which can help the person to improve his Listening skill:

1. Face the speaker. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
2. Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
3. Minimize external distractions. Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.
4. Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really,” “Interesting,” as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”

5. Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
6. Minimize internal distractions. If your own thoughts keep horning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.
7. Keep an open mind. Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.
8. Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation. Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.
9. Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish to defend yourself. The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won't feel the need to repeat it, and you'll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.
10. Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won't interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying..."