



## Are You Truly Listening?

### Description

As Stephen Covey so accurately expressed, “The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.”

Do you find yourself listening to *reply* instead of to really *understand* what the other person is saying?

Now more than ever, our ability to truly listen to and hear one another is critical to our personal and professional relationships. As part of our ability to help others, we can call on past history and intuition to inform. However, if we want to genuinely connect with others and be of assistance to them, it's important we first understand their needs.

To avoid just passively listening and to improve your active listening skills, there are eight behaviors you can try:

1. **Be present and attentive.** To the best of your ability, clear your mind of any thoughts not related to what you're discussing.
2. **Limit distractions.** Try to get rid of any outside factors that might take your attention away from the conversation.
3. **Avoid judgment.** Listening to what someone is saying without attaching your own opinion or feelings to what is being said is not easy. However, keep an open mind as much as possible. If you can master this behavior, you set the stage to sincerely hear what others have to say.
4. **Pay attention to body language and nonverbal cues.** Many people believe that over 90% of our communication is nonverbal, so try to be aware of what someone is conveying to you beyond their words.
5. **Practice empathy.** Put yourself in the other person's shoes and imagine how things might feel from their perspective. If you are successful, your own body language will portray your empathy and understanding.
6. **Steer clear of interrupting.** Wait for the speaker to pause before asking questions, and don't be afraid of a little silence. It's difficult to avoid frequent comments and relating other's experience to our own. However, it is also incredibly important to give them time and space to speak. Thoughtful questions will help further your understanding, but don't interject until the

time is right.

7. **Don't get too caught up in the details.** Don't focus so much on the little things and lose sight of the big picture.
8. **Reflect, confirm, and summarize what is heard.** By doing this periodically and at the end of our conversation, we let the speaker know that we actively listened and paid attention to what was said. We also have the opportunity to clarify when something is misunderstood and avoid ignoring what we don't understand.

*What are some other active listening tips you've tried and found successful? How do you make sure you're really listening and taking in what you're hearing?*

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