

Listen to Understand, Not Respond

by Patrick J. Donadio, MBA, CSP, MCC

There is more to the message than meets the ears. Some studies show that as much as 80 percent of your message is conveyed not just by your words but by the manner in which you say them, including your voice and your body language.

To be an active listener you must engage your whole self into the process; not only by focusing on the words, but also on the person's facial expressions, posture, voice, eyes and gestures. As Peter Drucker said, "The most important thing in communicating is to hear what isn't being said."

The following techniques will help you actively get involved in the process:

Internal summary - Concentrate on what is being said and try to summarize the main points in your mind. Listen to understand, not to respond.

Restate - For clarification, repeat what the person just said using their words. "Let me repeat this to make sure I understand. ..."

Paraphrase - Restate what the speaker said in your own words to see if you understand the message. "So you would like me to. ..."

Minimize interruptions - Don't try to take phone calls, read or complete another task while someone is talking to you. Taking notes on key points is a good way to be an active listener.

Allow for silence - Pauses may seem uncomfortable, but don't automatically interject your comments. People may need a little time to gather their thoughts. Silence shows strength.

Ask questions - Encourage people to tell you more, or force them to think through an idea, by asking open-ended questions. "What do you think we could do?"

Watch non-verbals - Look for eye contact, change in voice, facial expressions, body posture, gestures and so forth. Any mismatched signals could give you more insight. Remember, more than half the message is nonverbal.

Avoid prejudging - Get all the facts before you draw your conclusion. People sometimes have a tendency to see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. Try avoiding phrases like: "That will never work. ... We tried that before. ... Stop, I know exactly what you're going to say. ..."

Next time you begin "communicating," try using these techniques. Who knows? You might be able to save time, money or even increase the quality of your service with these easy concepts.

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