

MANAGING THE WHITE SPACE

by Phil Laure, May 1, 2011

Listening Skills - Part II

In my last article, I discussed the first five ways to improve your listening skills by being aware of your listening behavior. So, have you looked at the first five behaviors and made an attempt to improve? After the listening inventory is complete, I have listed the five levels of listening and tips to becoming an Empathetic Listener.

As promised, here are listening behaviors six through ten. See if these apply to you as much as the first five did. As before, please rate yourself from 1 to 5, 1 = Almost Never and 5 = Almost Always. Ready? Here we go!

6. How often do you think about an answer during the question? How often do we “jump to conclusions” while the person is trying to relate all the pertinent facts? We often jump in before they have finished and answer the question we know is coming only to find out the question is different!

7. How often do you get distracted? You are not interested so your mind wanders, you hear but you do not listen! The person then checks to see if you are listening and ends up having to repeat. An embarrassing situation at best career limiting at worst!

8. How often do you avoid difficult explanations? After all, aren't these conversations hard? You have to really listen to the sender in order to get everything! I have some super tips for this one!

9. How often do you ignore the nonverbal message? Experts say that 60% of communication is nonverbal. Do you ignore or miss the nonverbal communication?

10. How often do you fail to provide correct feedback? Think about Inventory items 5 (Fake Attention) and 7 (Get Distracted). Do you provide the correct feedback to the person sending you the message?

How did you do? Did you keep score to see the level of your Listening Inventory? A listening scoresheet can be found at www.pjlaure.com/. Score your answers and rate yourself. If you scored below 70, you need help with listening skills, 70 to 89, you listen well and over 90 you are an exceptional listener!

There are five levels to listening:

Level I: Ignoring - physically appearing to listen, but actually focusing elsewhere

Level II: Pretending - responding to information with “OK! Right, Yeah.”

Level III: Selective - Listening only to parts of information

Level IV: Attentive - focusing on the words that are being said.

Level V: Empathetic - Listener focuses on the words that are said as well as the nonverbal cues and voice tone. Listener gets inside the information provider's frame of reference expressed through words, actions and emotions.

The listener is listening first to understand, then to be understood and respond.

Tips to becoming an Empathetic Listener include:

- Listen actively by seeing the nonverbal cues
- Create a conducive environment for empathetic listening
- Ask questions
- Clarify what should be done with the information.

My next article will discuss the listening responsibilities for providers and receivers of information.