

Have You Been Complimented on Your Listening Skills Lately? (926 words)

Listening to others is exhausting. Coworkers go on and on and on, and we get so tired of listening to them. Sometimes it's hard to listen. Active listening requires physical effort, psychological effort, paraphrasing, and asking the right questions.

Listening Takes Physical Effort: Listening effectively is hard work. The heart rate quickens, respiration increases, and body temperature rises. Just like a stress response, it can be physically and psychologically draining.

The process of listening involves a sequence of six exhausting stages. The first stage is motivation. The listener must create the motivation or desire to listen. Which is tough when you believe you have heard all before. The second stage involves receiving the stimulus. Keep in mind, as a listener, you receive not only auditory stimuli but also visual stimuli. It is what you hear and see. The third stage requires attending. The listener concentrates on the message received in order to store it for later use. Focusing on what the information concerns. The fourth stage is interpreting. The listener considers the verbal and nonverbal messages and then analyzes the message for the proper meaning. The fifth stage is responding. After a message has been interpreted by the listener, he or she must respond to it in some way. Even no response is still a response. The sixth and final stage is remembering. Remembering is the ability to recall information. Having a system or process that helps you retain and explain later.

Focus on improving your performance in each of these six stages of listening. Become just a little bit more effective in each stage and you will move from being an adequate listener to becoming an active listener.

Listening Takes Psychological Effort: There is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is a physiological event and listening is a psychological event. We hear 24 hours a day, but we really listen to very little.

Active listening involves four major steps. Step one. Getting prepared, physically and psychologically. Get a good night's rest. Eat a balanced diet and improve your posture. Psychologically review the agenda, the issues that will be discussed, and jot down some questions you would like to have answered. Step two. Staying involved. Take notes, ask questions, share your opinions, offer insight, share information, and participate in discussions. Step three. Keeping an open mind. The key to effective listening is to listen conscientiously for completeness and not jump to hasty generalizations or conclusions. Listen comprehensively and try to withhold judgment until all of the information has been considered. Step four. Reviewing and evaluating. Two things: Review and evaluate the information and also review and evaluate your performance as a listener. When did you drift off, lose focus, or daydream.

When you have an upcoming meeting or conversation get prepared, stay involved, keep an open mind, review and evaluate the information and your performance as a listener.

Paraphrase to Guarantee Accurate Interpretation: Paraphrasing is necessary, can save time, and can certainly save money by preventing misunderstandings and mistakes. Paraphrasing is an understanding and reflecting response that indicates that your intent is to understand the other person's thoughts and feelings. Studies suggest listening interpretation is only about 25% accurate, which means three out of four times we have it a little bit off.

There are three main reasons why we paraphrase. One reason is to demonstrate that we do understand. By saying something like, "I understand you are frustrated with the new policy." The second reason we paraphrase is to show that we are trying to understand, by saying something like, "If I understand you correctly your thinking this process is not working the way we hoped?" The third reason we paraphrase is so people can hear what they've just said. People think faster than they can talk and sometimes we need to "parrot" right back the statement they just made. By saying something like, "What I heard you say was..." and often people will rephrase their own statements to be more clear and accurate about their feelings and thoughts.

The key to effective paraphrasing is to listen closely whenever there is a chance for misunderstanding then reflect the thoughts and feelings of the other person. Paraphrase to clarify the conversation and enhance accuracy.

Ask "What" and "How" Questions: Asking questions shows that you have interest and genuine concern. Being an active listener can be an opportunity for you to be a role model and demonstrate that it is okay, maybe even admirable, to ask questions. The key to asking questions is to ask the right questions. The best questions to ask are "what" and "how" questions. Because there are no wrong answers to what or how questions. You give the other person tremendous flexibility in how they can respond. It takes the pressure off.

If you ask a "who" question, there is only one right answer. If you ask a "when" question, there is only one right answer. If you ask a "where" question, there is only one right answer. If you ask a "why" question, which implies a judgment or evaluation, now you will be wrestling on the floor because people will feel like they have to justify their comments and actions.

With good "what" and "how" questions you will probably get the who's, the what's the when's, the where's, and the why's, without putting pressure on the conversation. Besides, the more people talk the better they feel.

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