

The Listening Leader

The Listening Skills Assessment

This quick and easy tool is primarily intended for your own self-assessment, but you can use the second part to gain a sense of how *other* people assess your listening skills. Their input may help you identify some blind spots and create a better awareness of how you can improve your ability to really tune into others and listen more effectively.

Instructions

Read each statement and pick the response that best fits your listening habits and experience. Circle the *number* in the appropriate *column*, using the following rating scale:

- Column A – Not True / Never / Not At All
- Column B – Somewhat True / Seldom / Rarely
- Column C – Fairly True / Occasionally / Sometimes
- Column D – True / Often / Frequently
- Column E – Very True / Always / Very Much

When you have completed the assessment, add up the numbers you circled to get a total amount that you can compare with the interpretations provided. Use the individual items to gain a sense of the specific habits or behaviors you can focus on changing, in order to improve your listening.

If you would like to get another person's perspective on your listening skills, use the second assessment tool provided. Give it to a trusted colleague or team member who interacts with you on a regular basis—someone who is willing to give you honest and direct feedback. *In particular*, compare their ratings with your ratings of yourself (especially on similar items) and see if there are any major discrepancies between yours and theirs. That will show evidence of your blind spots.

Getting Helpful Feedback

The best way to improve any skill is to get accurate feedback as you work on developing that particular skill. Trusted colleagues are a good source of feedback. You can also get effective feedback from your own team members. Here's how to do it...

1. Recruit someone to help you—someone you trust to give you honest and direct feedback.
2. Ask them to observe you over a certain space of time (one or two months works fairly well).
3. Have them observe your behavior as you work on developing your listening skill.
4. If you have any particular bad listening habits (e.g. interrupting other people when they talk) have them keep their eyes open for that particular bad habit.
5. Ask for their feedback each time they observe your attempts at better listening. Get their feedback soon after each incident. Remember... the best feedback is immediate.

The Personal Trainer is a resource for growing leaders produced by Dr. Jim Dyke, the Founder and Director of **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.**—an organization dedicated to equipping men and women with skills and principles pertinent to the role and life of a transformational leader of the 21st century. You can go online to www.CLlonline.com to discover more ways **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.** can bring its resources and expertise to your organization and help your people become better leaders and better followers. Copyright 2020 James R. Dyke — all rights reserved.

The Listening Skills Assessment

		A	B	C	D	E
1.	When other people are talking to me... instead of focusing my thoughts on what they are saying, I tend to focus my thoughts on what I am going to say next.	5	4	3	2	1
2.	When other people are talking with me, I tend to multi-task by doing other things at the same time.	5	4	3	2	1
3.	People complain about my lack of listening.	5	4	3	2	1
4.	I hear this a lot from other people— <i>I told you that already.</i>	5	4	3	2	1
5.	People have to say my name more than once in order to get my attention.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	When other people are talking to me, I tend to look them directly in the eye.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I have a tendency to interrupt people, especially when they ramble, or don't get to the point right away.	5	4	3	2	1
8.	I tend to finish other people's sentences.	5	4	3	2	1
9.	I hear this a lot from people— <i>Are you listening to me?</i>	5	4	3	2	1
10.	I multi-task when I'm on the phone with someone.	5	4	3	2	1
11.	In meetings, my attention "drifts."	5	4	3	2	1
12.	When I go to the store for my spouse, I often bring back the wrong item, or forget an item.	5	4	3	2	1
13.	When other people are talking to me, I often respond during the conversation by nodding my head, or saying something like <i>yes... uh huh... okay...I see.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
14.	During conversation, I often have to ask people to repeat what they just said because my attention has drifted.	5	4	3	2	1
15.	When I'm in an airport, I find myself having to ask other people to repeat information that was announced over the public address system because I wasn't paying attention.	5	4	3	2	1
16.	In meetings I sometimes have to ask someone next to me what was just said because my attention drifted.	5	4	3	2	1
17.	I often forget the name of someone who was just introduced to me.	5	4	3	2	1
18.	I find myself making mistakes because I didn't correctly understand instructions that were given to me.	5	4	3	2	1
19.	People tell me I'm a good listener.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I hear this a lot from other people— <i>That's not what I said.</i>	5	4	3	2	1

Interpretation

A score of 80 to 100 = Congratulations—you are an excellent listener!

60 to 80 = You are a good listener, but you have some areas where you can improve.

20 to 60 = You definitely need to develop better listening habits. Use the assessment items to help you zero in on specific habits to change. Use the tips to develop techniques that will help you improve.

Instructions

Read each statement and think about how the statement applies to the person you are assessing. Pick the response that best fits your observation or experience of the person you are describing. If you aren't able to rate a certain behavior, put an X next its statement number. Record your response by circling the *number* in the appropriate *column*, using the following rating scale:

- Column A – Not True / Never / Not At All**
Column B – Somewhat True / Seldom / Rarely
Column C – Fairly True / Occasionally / Sometimes
Column D – True / Often / Frequently
Column E – Very True / Always / Very Much

Name of person filling out this assessment form: _____

		A	B	C	D	E
1.	This person often seems distracted when other people are talking to them.	5	4	3	2	1
2.	This person often multi-tasks when other people are talking to them.	5	4	3	2	1
3.	People complain about this person's lack of listening.	5	4	3	2	1
4.	This person often asks people to repeat what they just said.	5	4	3	2	1
5.	People find it difficult to get this person's attention.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	In conversations with other people, this person tends to look people in the eye.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	This person has a tendency to interrupt the other party in a conversation.	5	4	3	2	1
8.	This person tends to finish other people's sentences.	5	4	3	2	1
9.	People complain about this person's lack of understanding or confusion about situations.	5	4	3	2	1
10.	This person tends to multi-task when they are on the phone.	5	4	3	2	1
11.	In meetings, this person seems to lack attention.	5	4	3	2	1
12.	This person squeezes a lot of conversations into the habit of "walking while talking."	5	4	3	2	1
13.	When talking with others, this person often responds during the conversation by nodding their head, or saying something like <i>yes... uh huh... okay...I see.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
14.	During conversations, this person often asks others to repeat what they just said.	5	4	3	2	1
15.	This person often asks me to repeat something I just said.	5	4	3	2	1
16.	In meetings, this person often comments or shares ideas unrelated to the topic of discussion.	5	4	3	2	1
17.	In meetings, this person often talks with another person instead of listening to the group discussion.	5	4	3	2	1
18.	Other people often correct this person's misunderstanding of conversations or instructions.	5	4	3	2	1
19.	Other people regard this person as a good listener.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	In my opinion, this person is a good listener.	1	2	3	4	5

Tips for Better Listening

The most important thing to understand about effective listening is that it takes *work*—work and mental concentration. Most people don't listen well because they think it is easy or comes naturally. It doesn't. Effective listeners are committed to the hard work involved. They also apply a purposeful and intentional mental focus. Use the tips in this section to gain the right focus and listen *better*.

Deal with distractions

Remove any external distractions that you can—put down the phone; turn away from your computer. Move the conversation to another setting, if necessary—find a quiet place; close the door to your office; get away from noise, traffic, etc.

Mindfully set aside any mental distractions—pressing deadlines; personal issues; other tasks you need to do that may be weighing on your mind.

Focus mentally

Remind yourself to focus on what the other person is saying, instead of thinking about what you are going to say next. Establish eye contact during the conversation.

Don't react to their emotion

If the other person appears angry or upset, don't react to their emotional state. Be prepared for strong language or accusations, but don't take them personally.

Stay calm

Take a deep breath, and mentally prepare to listen carefully.

Let the other person vent

Let them talk. Allow them to express their emotion.

Don't interrupt

Don't respond to their information until they have finished talking. Especially don't try to interrupt in order to defend yourself. Your goal is to get as much information as you can, and to gain an accurate understanding of their point of view.

Take notes if it helps you

If they seem extremely agitated (and you are concerned they may not like you writing while they talk) you might want to simply ask permission to take notes during the conversation.

Use questions and reflective paraphrasing to make sure you understand what they are saying

Reflective paraphrasing is a simple technique—you simply tell the other person what you think they are saying, only using your own words. Introduce this process with a simple phrase like, *let me see if I am understanding you clearly—are you saying...* ; or *let me see if I'm clear about this—you are telling me...* or any equivalent.

Identify their chief concern

Make sure you understand clearly what they are most concerned about... their main issue.

Be open to their point of view

A person's point of view is a function of their information; assumptions; expectations; values; priorities; background; and experiences. Their point of view may be very different than yours. The key is to try and understand *why* it is different. NOTE: You don't have to *agree* with another person's point of view in order to understand it.

Validate their feelings

Once you clarify another person's point of view, you are in a position to understand why they might feel the way they do. You can express that understanding with a simple statement of validation:

I think if I were in your situation, I would probably feel the same way.