

Network to Work Meeting

September 2018

RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS*

Can you Hear Me Now? All About Listening!

Are you a good listener? Listening is a highly valued employability or “soft” skill sought after by all employers, and it is one they will want you to demonstrate during the interview process.

What Makes a Good Listener?

Good listeners strive to fully understand what others want to communicate, particularly when the statement lacks clarity. They try to decode and interpret verbal messages and nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expressions, posture, etc.

Through their body language and other cues (*known as attentive listening – more on this below*), effective listeners subtly communicate to the speaker that they are listening. Additionally, they encourage and welcome the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of others.

Great listeners also show their curiosity and ask a lot of questions. This makes a great impression, particularly in an interview! One way to demonstrate your listening skills in an interview is to allow the interviewer to complete each question and statement before responding. Do not interrupt and be sure that your responses genuinely answer the question. Remember that it is perfectly fine to take a few moments to frame the right response. Doing so shows that you have listened and are considerate enough to formulate the best answer.

When a person demonstrates good listening, he or she:

1. Acts as a mirror and **reflects** back what they see and hear, summarizing the words and feelings.
 - **Reflection** is repeating and reframing / paraphrasing what the speaker has said to show that you truly understand what they are telling you.

Example: *“When you talk about all the elements of your organization’s mission, such as the goal to enhance the independence of your consumers, I can see how energized and alive you become. It seems like yours is an organization that really believes in and honors its mission.”*

2. Asks questions to **clarify** what is being said in order to truly understand.
 - *“I think I’m hearing you say X, is that right?”*

3. Seeks to establish a total connection, being interested in every word and engaging with **open-ended questions** intended to gain understanding (as opposed to data-driven, yes / no questions).
 - **Example:** “What is it like . . .?” “What do you think . . . ?” “How do you feel about . . . ?”

This in turn allows the other person to feel seen, heard, understood and known.

4. Focuses more on what the other person is saying – the meaning of their words - than on how he or she might respond:
 - A general tendency is to listen at a superficial level, hearing words while thinking about our response or *how the words relate to our own lives*. **This is known as “level 1 listening”**.
 - Good listening entails focusing enough to try to understand what underlies the words and what else we might actually be hearing, paying more attention to what is being said. **This is known as “level 2 listening”**.

Example: Consider this scenario – your friend’s child has just gone off to college. You’ve already experienced that.

 - **Your friend says** “I can’t believe I’m an empty nester now”.
 - **You respond** by talking about your own experience when your child left. (This is level 1 listening.)
 - But what your **friend may need** is for you to ask “How is it for you with your child gone? How is it to be an empty nester?” (This is level 2 listening.)

5. Notices body language and has an awareness of the feeling behind the words.

6. Listens with the primary intention to connect, as opposed to trying to control or impress.

The Listening Process

At work, when you have direct interaction with your boss, client, co-worker, customer, etc., how well you listen will determine how well you can identify their needs, demands and preferences.

There are two components to active listening that lead to success in the workplace: reflection and attention. We’ve already discussed reflection above.

Attentive listening involves holding eye contact, nodding, having good posture, and mirroring the speaker’s body language to show genuine interest in what they are saying. In addition to these nonverbal cues, you must also allow the speaker to finish their thought in its entirety. It is important to demonstrate attentive listening in an interview as well as at the workplace.

What Makes a Bad Listener?

Interrupting the other party indicates that your listening skills are underdeveloped. Likewise, responding in a way that fails to answer the question reflects poorly on your listening skills, especially in a job interview.

Talking too much is also very problematic, as proper conversations should be well-balanced for both parties. Monopolizing a conversation prevents you from listening and the other party from fully expressing what they want to say. It hinders the ability to form a true connection with the other person. The result is you have just made a poor impression.

Examples of Effective Listening in Interviews and at the Workplace

1. A job candidate shares her understanding of an unclear question during an interview and asks if she has it right.
2. An interviewer notices that a candidate looks her in the eye when asserting a key strength. (What does the failure to make eye contact suggest?)
3. A customer service worker repeats a patron's problem or complaint back to her to reassure her that she has been heard.
4. A supervisor nods and says, "I hear you," to encourage a staff person to continue to talk about their difficult experience.
5. A meeting facilitator encourages a reticent group member to share her views about a proposal.
6. An interviewer asks a follow-up question to gain further clarification on the ways in which a candidate has applied a critical skill in a past job.
7. A manager summarizes what her team has said during a staff meeting and asks them if she has heard things correctly.
8. At the end of a performance review, an employee restates the specific areas in which his supervisor asks him to improve.
9. At a client meeting, a salesperson asks an open-ended question like, "What can I do to serve you better?" and encourages his counterpart to express any concerns fully.
10. An employee pays careful attention to a speaker at a training session and asks clarifying questions on the information they are receiving.

IN SUM: Questions and Observations that Demonstrate Good Listening:

Think about the following when you are engaged in a conversation:

1. What are you hearing? Respond to that. Reflect back and summarize words and feelings; share observations.

2. Reframe and clarify your assumptions: “Do you mean . . .?” “This is what I’m hearing, is that correct?”
3. What are you sensing? (emotions, etc.)
4. What are you noticing about the other person’s energy?
5. What seems important to the talker?
6. What expression are is the talker showing?
7. What do you notice about his or her tone or pace of conversation? What does that say?
8. What needs, desires, or vision are being expressed?
9. Is the talker becoming energized or withdrawing? What is making that happening?
10. What impact are you having with your questions?

Adapted from:

“Types of Listening Skills”, by Alison Doyle, from *The Balance*”, Updated April 01, 2018
<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/types-of-listening-skills-with-examples-2063759>

“Employability Skills”, by Alison Doyle, Updated July 13, 2018
<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/employability-skills-list-and-examples-4143571>

“Keys to Effective Listening”, by Melita DeBellis, updated August 1, 2018.