

# Knock, Knock. Is Anybody Home? Effective Communication Tips

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Which is more important, listening or being listened to? They are equally important. Listening skills aren't easy to master. They take patience and persistence, but the payoff is **BIG!** Conflicts are avoided or minimized; relationships are protected and nourished; valuable information is gathered and a more complete, growth-oriented lifestyle is established.

## Want some tips for effective listening?

**Stop talking.** You cannot listen when you are talking.

- **Empathize with the person's situation.** Try to put yourself in their place and see the situation through their eyes.
- **Compliment whenever you can, but sincerely.** Let people know what their unique value is to you. Strong, self-assured people give positive strokes freely, while weak people are miserly with their compliments.
- **Ask lots of questions.** How? What? Where? and Why? are leading questions to gather information rather than forcing your opinion on an unreceptive listener. Make it your personal goal to know what people around you really think.
- **Keep judgment to yourself.** Avoid "why didn't you," or, "you should have," blaming statements. You can't listen when blaming. If you are quick to judge people as wrong or bad, then you also dismiss their strengths and wisdom. Listen to what they have to say first. There is plenty of time for judgment and decision later.
- **Use reflective feedback - repeating back what you think you heard.** This avoids our personal filter for communication through our own prejudices, biases, and life experiences. Using active listening or reflective feedback will make an angry or distracted person stop and listen. More importantly, it makes them feel heard and validated. Questions such as, "Is this what you need?" or, "Do I understand you correctly?" shows support, interest, and reduces misunderstanding, even if you disagree with them.
- **Use good eye contact.** Besides the obvious feeling of full attention and validation, you could also miss important non-verbal cues. Subconscious feelings often come out in small gestures that are contradictory to the words being expressed. You will learn a lot and validate the person speaking, which in turn will increase their security around you.
- **Use appropriate smiles, nods, and uh-huhs to indicate your full attention.** Comments like "that's interesting," or, "tell me more about that," can go a long way toward reassuring the speaker. Be sincere and don't overdo it!

- **Listen for ideas as well as facts.** Don't get bogged down in the details so that you can't see the big picture.
- **Am I being heard?** Ask your listener to describe what you just said to make sure that you are being heard. Look for distractions and stop the conversation if it's obvious you are not being listened to or other distractions are preventing effective communication. Begin again when you have full attention.
- **Avoid hasty judgments and assumptions.** Don't argue mentally while the other person is speaking. You can't possibly be listening and digesting when you are arguing mentally with what the other person is saying. Even without saying a word, they feel your distraction and hostility.
- **Avoid Self-Negatives.** Don't judge yourself based upon hasty assumptions of what the other person must be thinking. "He doesn't care," "she doesn't understand," etc. You can make these tragic misinterpretations into self-fulfilling prophecies.
- **Remember that insensitivity often covers up hurt.** Be careful and protect yourself so that you are not run over, but remember that defensiveness is usually the result of ego trying to stay in control.
- Refuse to use revenge or angry comebacks that would only cause more conflict. YOU can stay in control even if the other person can't.
- **Release the chip on your shoulder.** Resentment and anger grow over time. They can destroy even the strongest relationship. To forgive means being open to change. Let go of old resentments that just get in the way of current progress. Make it your goal to give full attention. Don't start with "Yes, but..." Your mission is not to change the person, but to understand them better so that you can manage the situation. Listen with an open attitude.
- **Resist over-talking.** If you monopolize the conversation, you will dominate the situation and not remain open to new ideas. Make sure everybody else has a chance to make his or her point.
- **Control your anger.** Try not to get angry at what the other person is saying. Your anger may prevent you from understanding the words, the meaning, or the intent. Use open-ended questions to make sure you fully understand what is being said, and then express your anger using "I am annoyed at that," or "I feel angry because..."
- **Try to react to the ideas, not to the person.** Don't let your reactions to the person influence your interpretation of what is being said. The ideas may be good, even if you don't like the way they are being presented.
- **Listen to what is not said.** You can learn just as much by what the other person leaves out as by what he/she includes.

- **The difference in listening - speaking rate.** You can listen faster than a person can talk. We speak about 100 - 150 words per minute and think at 250 - 500 words per minute. Use this difference to your advantage by doing just that - thinking!
- **Barriers to Effective Communication**
  - ❖ Not paying attention - being distracted.
  - ❖ Poorly expressed messages, i.e., “You know what I mean.” (No, I don’t!)
  - ❖ Saying what we expect to hear.
  - ❖ Having hidden assumptions in our own communication.
  - ❖ Using jargon that may not be known by our audience.
  - ❖ Allowing emotions to control our speech.

### **Tips for Better Communication**

- **Use “I” statements.** Practice saying, “I think,” “I feel,” “I don’t know if...,” rather than “You did this,” “You should have,” “Why weren’t you there?” The use of “you” words makes your listener defensive and the use of “I” words makes them more receptive.



**Hesha Abrams, Esq.** a nationally acclaimed attorney mediator for over 30 years, is known for crafting highly creative settlements in very difficult cases. She has created settlements worth over \$700 million in the past year alone. She specializes in creating innovative solutions for complex or difficult matters in Commercial, Intellectual Property and “Deal Mediation”, which is driving a complex business deal to successful signing. She has the unique ability to work with big egos and strong personalities. Hesha has successfully mediated for thousands of parties and was an innovator in the mediation field serving on the legislative task force that drafted the landmark Texas ADR law. She mediates, consults, and negotiates on behalf of private parties throughout the country and internationally. She has worked in London, Hong Kong, Mexico, Thailand and India and with parties from all over the globe in complex patent licensing deals. She taught mediation and negotiation at the 2001 International Symposium on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution in The Hague. She was on the national panel for Dow Corning Implant cases and was the Chair of the Texas Bar Intellectual Property ADR Committee. She has been appointed Delegate to the Fifth Circuit Judicial Conference, 1988, 1990, 2002, speaker 2005, elected as a fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation in 2006 and received the Brutsché Award for Excellence in Mediation from the Association of Attorney Mediators.

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