

Northrise Toastmasters

Notes on Listening Skills

The joys of having one mouth but two ears

Typically, we only remember half of what we hear and two days later we would be lucky if we remembered a quarter of what we originally heard.

- Listening is a learned skill. There is big difference between merely hearing and actually listening.
- Poor listening wastes time and can result in misinformation (or no information).

To listen effectively:

1. Focus totally on the speaker and what they are saying. This needs to be both visual and aural. Filter out all distractions, internal and external. Manage your emotions.
2. Prioritise, listen primarily for concepts and main ideas. Once you are tuned in to these, then take note of the supporting details and facts.
3. Mentally outline or take notes. Take written notes if possible to reinforce the mental notes. Mind maps are effective and fast.
4. Don't get so involved that you form hasty judgements or hear things that were never said. Judgement is desirable, but hasty judgement can hinder. This is one of the few areas where you are encouraged to focus on content rather than delivery.
5. Don't prejudge (eg speakers with accents or less than prestigious occupations) - try to be objective. Avoid assumptions and presuppositions and the **HALO effect**.

"There are no such things as an uninteresting subject; there are only uninterested people."

GK Chesterton.

6. Avoid interrupting - seek to understand. We interrupt when we:

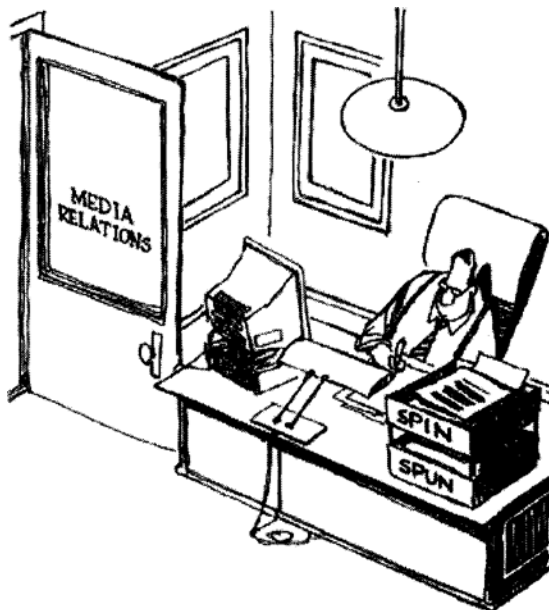
- Argue mentally with the speaker.
- Continue to dwell on an aspect of what we have heard after the speaker has moved on.
- Don't remain open to reasons, arguments or new information.
- If you hear something with which you disagree, ask "why" and listen on in the hope of finding out.

Afterwards:

We all (well, most of us) think dramatically faster than we hear. You have time to form conclusions about what you hear and record those reasoned conclusions and interpretations.

At the end of a presentation, organise your thoughts into permanent notes or a mind map. Don't procrastinate.

Compare and contrast what you heard with what you already know - give it a frame of reference and relate it to your previous experience. Number the points and/or create bullet points.



In small group situations:

try and establish rapport with the speaker.

Use eye contact and sympathetic or attentive facial expressions to connect with the speaker and make a connection.

Be aware of your body language (remember, you cannot not communicate).

Nod and smile if appropriate. Act and behave like a good listener.

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