

Welcome to Basis Points! Each month, Basis Points provides you tips and techniques that we've gleaned from a variety of sources to help better your business life. The theme of this month's issue is "Listening". Communication has been described as the skillful transfer of understanding between two parties. For this to occur with consistent success, one must be as adroit in the art of listening as one is in creating and sending messages. Herewith, some ideas on improving your listening skills.

Listen Up!

Several prominent business consultants believe that the ability to listen effectively can



be the ultimate strategic advantage.

When you are attuned to what your marketplace, competitors and employees are saying and thinking – with genuine understanding and maximum clarity – the stage is set to accommodate change, be truly innovative and compete successfully.

A recent study reveals that managers spend up to 60% of a typical business day listening to others. And yet, far more time is spent developing one's ability to read, write and speak than in improving one's listening skills.

Research shows that we hear only about 25% of what is said. And after two months' time, we remember less than half of that. Listeners can misunderstand, misinterpret or simply forget that which has just been shared with them. It's important to remember that hearing differs from listening. Hearing is a physical act: the reception of sounds by your ears. Listening is a mental activity: it requires concentration, cooperation and an open mind.

"Remember: we were given two ears and only one mouth for a reason. Listening is twice as hard as talking."

Listening With Your Eyes

To improve understanding of what's being said, it's often helpful to observe how it's being said. The best listeners use not only their ears, but their eyes. Why? Remarkably, non-verbal cues (such as body language, dress, physical surroundings account) for 55% of everything we communicate. By contrast, 38% comes from our tone of voice, with a paltry 7% resulting from the words we choose. Among the types of non-verbal communications:

1) **Kinesics** – Body movements, facial expressions, gestures. Each can provide important signals of the individual's degree of attention, involvement and responsiveness to a message. Signs the person you're speaking with is responding positively to what you're saying: he or she leans forward, raises eyebrows, smiles (even if briefly) and keeps hands/arms uncrossed and open.

2) **Haptics** – A scientific phrase that covers a broad range of touching activities (handshakes, kisses, arm squeezes are a few examples). While such gestures are often used to foster interpersonal closeness, occasionally they're employed to help regulate conversations. Example: touching a hand or grabbing an arm to gain entry into a conversation.

3) **Proxemics** – How people use and behave in the physical space around them strongly affects communication. A comfortable and relaxed arrangement for two people at a table is to sit corner-to-corner. This permits maximum eye contact, reasonable closeness and signals cooperation. Across-the-table positions are inherently more competitive, enabling each party to send/observe a steady stream of non-verbal messages.

Sources: "Silent Messages", Albert Mehrabian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, UCLA (1971)
"It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It", Michel Fortin (2005)

The Lost Art of Active Listening

Active listening goes beyond simple comprehension. It means listening with care and responding to another in a way that improves mutual understanding. Its benefits are many:

- it compels one to listen attentively
- it helps avoid misunderstandings
- it tends to open people up and get them to say more (which is particularly helpful in conflict)

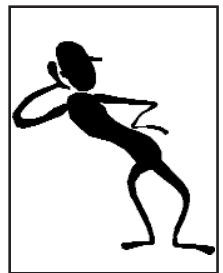
To practice your active listening skills, try the following:

- 1 Suspend all other activities and focus on the other person
- 2 Maintain strong, clear eye contact
- 3 Listen not just to the words (what's being said) but to the underlying feelings (what's really meant)
- 4 Don't interrupt; instead, restate what's been said and – if need be – ask questions to clarify
- 5 Be empathic and non-judgmental
- 6 If you have to state your views, hold off until the other person has finished

Source: "Active Listening: Hear What People Are Really Saying", MindTools.com

Hear This: Three Interesting Facts About Listening

- 1 **Different speeds.** Humans listen at the rate of 750-1000 words-per-minute. But we speak at a rate of 120-150 words-per-minute. Is it any wonder our minds wander when someone's talking to us?
- 2 **Internal noise.** Think of the brain as the central processing unit of your listening experience. In the information-dense era in which we live, the noise levels within our minds – made up of critical judgments, visual evaluations and competing messages – make it harder than ever for what we hear to be correctly interpreted and remembered.
- 3 **Competitive advantage.** Want proof of how important listening is? Kodak has just announced it's creating a new position, Chief Listening Officer, whose task will be to monitor social network conversations (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, et. al.) to truly "hear" what clients and prospects are saying about the firm and its product/service offerings.



Source: "The Importance of Listening in Social Media", OpenTheDialogue.com