

# Active Listening

## 5 Things To Do To Be A Better Listener

contributed by Emily Iem



### 1. Pay Attention

- Put aside other work – multi-tasking is not a skill that encourages or helps listening.
- Don't mentally prepare a response while the other person is still speaking. If you:
  - › Have a comment or question, take a quick note and turn your attention back to the speaker.
  - › Need more time, ask the speaker to wait so you can make a note and then they can continue.
- Avoid distractions – emails, instant messages, or side conversations all take your focus off of the person who is speaking. With so many of us working remotely and so many conference calls, it's easy to allow other work or distractions to pull us away.

### 2. Communicate That You're Listening

- Be aware of your non-verbal communication – it 'speaks' loudly.
- Make direct eye contact with the speaker (if you're in-person or on a video call).
- Nod and smile to demonstrate you're listening and encourage the speaker to continue.
- Don't 'look' distracted – checking your phone or watch, tapping your pen, or doodling on your note pad, are clear indicators that you are not listening.
- Avoid negative facial expressions like rolling your eyes, shaking your head, or taking a defensive posture with crossed arms.



### 3. Confirm What You're Hearing

- Ask questions to get clarification if you need it. Good ways to start a clarification:
  - › “Can you help me understand ...?”
  - › “Is this what you mean when you say...?”
- Paraphrase or summarize what the speaker is saying.  
Use phrases to start the summary like:
  - › “What I'm hearing is...” or
  - › “From what I understand...”.

### 4. Allow Someone to Finish

- Don't interrupt the speaker, wait a second or two to make sure someone is done. Or ask if it is a good time for a question.
- If you do interrupt, apologize and let the person continue. Don't keep talking.
- Recognize that this isn't a race or a timed debate. People will not feel heard if they can't get their thought or statement finished.

### 5. Be Respectful

- Be honest and open with your responses.
  - › Don't be cruel or judgmental.
- Speak confidently in your response – be assertive but not aggressive.
- Use positive language and acknowledge the value of someone's point before countering or providing a rebuttal.

