

Active listening

Key Takeaways:

- Listening well is a skill that you can learn.
- Good listening can help to improve relationships and make you more effective at work.
- "Active listening" is one way to listen better, by making a conscious effort to engage fully with what someone's saying, and to understand what they really mean.
- Five steps to active listening are: paying attention; showing that you're listening; providing feedback; deferring judgment; and responding appropriately.

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness and on the quality of your relationships with other people.

For instance:

- We listen to obtain information.
- We listen to understand.
- We listen for enjoyment.
- We listen to learn.

Given all the listening that we do, you would think we'd be good at it, in fact, most of us are not. How much we listen and remember varies, due to variables like context and content. But the ability to retain information, read-between-the-lines and comprehend what the speaker is really thinking are key management skills.

There are a variety of techniques that have been developed that can assist us extend our ability of listening. And one of the best things you can do to improve your listening skills is to practice active listening.

Tip:

Good communication skills require a high level of [self-awareness](#). Understanding your own personal style of communicating will go a long way toward helping you to create good and lasting impressions with others.

What Is Active Listening?

Active Listening is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, the **complete message** being communicated.

To do this, you must pay attention to the other person very carefully. You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by forming counterarguments while the other person is still speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to lose interest and lose focus on what the other person is saying.

Tip:

If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say them. This will reinforce their message and help you to stay focused.

To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what they're saying.

Acknowledgment can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh." You aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening can also help you to pay attention.

Try to respond to the speaker in a way that will encourage them to continue speaking, so that you can get the information that you need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said also communicates that you are listening and understanding the message.

The Benefits of Active Listening

To understand the importance of active listening, ask yourself if you've ever had a conversation when you wondered if the other person was listening to what you were saying. You wonder if your message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak. It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid.

By becoming a better listener, you can improve your productivity and your ability to influence, persuade, and negotiate. What's more, you'll avoid conflict and misunderstandings. All of these are necessary for workplace success!

Tip:

Be aware that active listening can give others the impression that you agree with them even if you don't. It's also important to avoid using active listening as a checklist of actions to follow, rather than really listening.

Top Tips for Active Listening

There are five key active listening techniques you can use to help you become a more effective listener:

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognise that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.

2. Show That You're Listening

Use your own body language and gestures to show that you are engaged.

- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Make sure that your posture is open and interested.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and "uh huh."

3. Provide Feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions.

- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is... ," and "Sounds like you are saying... ," are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say... ." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarise the speaker's comments periodically.

Tip:

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone says, say so. And ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX. Is that what you meant?"

4. Defer Judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
- Don't interrupt with counterarguments.

5. Respond Appropriately

Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting them down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think they would want to be treated.

To recap; What Are Active Listening Skills?

Active listening skills include paying attention to what someone else is saying, showing that you're listening, giving feedback, refraining from judgment, and responding respectfully.

Why Is Active Listening Important in Communication?

Active listening helps you to avoid conflict and misunderstandings. It can positively impact your productivity and workplace relationships. It's important for people to feel listened to when they're talking, and active listening ensures that this happens.

Key Points

There are five key techniques you can use to develop your active listening skills:

1. Pay attention.
2. Show that you're listening.
3. Provide feedback.

4. Defer judgment.
5. Respond appropriately.

Effective communication

Ineffective workplace communication costs U.S. businesses \$1.2 trillion annually, according to a report by Grammarly. Not surprisingly then, it is a top concern among Organisations. But getting communication right can be a challenge between people with varying backgrounds, vantage points, and cultures. From a law enforcement perspective ensuring you have excellent communication skills is imperative. Ultimately your communication skills will be on show, in particular if you are called to give evidence in a tribunal or at Court.

What Is Effective Communication?

Communication is the exchange of ideas and thoughts concerning work, but effective workplace communication is more than that. Effective communication is clear, and the receiver understands its purpose. So, both the sender and receiver of the message are satisfied.

Two-way Communication

Effective communication in the workplace is not just relaying information but explaining it in a way the receiver understands. Your objective is to ensure your message is sent in a manner that makes the other person feel heard and understood. In a law enforcement context you should always ensure empathy, don't forget this could be the first occasion your witness, victim or even suspect has ever had any involvement with authorities.

Benefits of Effective Workplace Communication

Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report reveals that out of the 31 million employees interviewed, only 13% of their team leaders practiced effective workplace communication. Yet, if you can't communicate organisational goals and operational changes, convey culture and values to new staff, it becomes challenging to achieve set goals.

Effective communication in a workplace will boost employee motivation, engagement, and satisfaction, which will reduce workplace conflicts and enhance productivity. Within the investigation environment, effective communication is crucial. You may be dealing with a variety of members of the public who have a variety of life experiences. Victims and witness maybe traumatised by what they have seen.

Increased Employee Engagement

One of the benefits of effective communication is that it creates better relationships between all involved, have commensurate skills promotes employee engagement.

Enhanced Motivation to Work

Nearly 30% of the time, organisations experience low retention because of ineffective communication between management and staff members. But when employees understand their tasks and how their roles affect the team's overall success, they're motivated to take necessary steps. Not only will your organisation enjoy longer employee retention, which strengthens your company, employees will stay motivated, which makes all the difference.

Fewer Workplace Conflicts

Since workplaces have persons of various cultures and beliefs, conflicts will naturally arise. Still, most conflicts are from ineffective communication tactics. Workplaces that embrace open communication and refined communication styles should therefore expect less conflict between managers and employees, and even among employees.

10 Tips for Effective Communication in the Workplace

With a solid understanding of how crucial effective communication in the workplace is, let's look at the top tips for effective communication, including the key communication skills you need to adopt, how to prioritise two-way communication, how to organise communication and more.

1. Communicate the Right Way

For more effective communication, first, ask these questions.

- What is the goal?
- Who needs to hear this?
- How should I pass the message across?

Ineffective communication may occur when staff talk to the wrong employees or share information in the wrong workplace setting. So, make sure the communication purpose directs you to relevant recipients. Also, choose the most appropriate communication method out of the different communication channels for the employee and situation. For example, an employee may prefer email, while another require a physical interaction, where there's eye contact, and they can read your body language. Generally, though, you should communicate urgent information or instructions face-to-face. As an example, when dealing with victims and witness, you should speak to them face to face then follow up your conversation in writing. You may require witness and victim to give evidence therefore it is imperative you ensure you maintain a professional relationship.

2. Prioritise Two-way Communication

Effective communication in the workplace involves speaking, active listening and feedback. Both parties need to understand each other. To improve this consider the below.

- **Practice active listening:** To avoid missing important information, don't just listen to another so you can reply. Instead, listen to understand them. Maintain eye contact with the speaker, jot down whatever comes to your mind while they're speaking and respond with relevant gestures to show you're listening. Don't forget if they are a victim, witness or suspect you may only get one opportunity to engage this person.

- **Embrace feedback:** Ask your team members for feedback on your message and communication style and note their comments and concerns. You can also offer feedback but do it thoughtfully. Also, adopt constructive feedback by first appreciating their work and then pointing out how to improve. Allow them to share their thoughts on your feedback, too.

3. Build Your Communication Skills

Effective workplace communication starts with you developing good communication skills. Here are the most critical skills you should practice-

- **Be clear:** To communicate effectively, be clear about your goal, use easy-to-understand words and avoid incomplete sentences. Also, provide context when communicating. If dealing with a victim you should ensure you have created the most appropriate environment with little interference, you must use simple, clear language. Always encourage questions, this minimises misunderstandings.

- **Remain courteous:** To enhance effective communication, you need to practice respectful communication and work through differences positively. Even during disagreements, try to stay polite, avoiding offensive words. Also, watch your body language and facial expressions, and use the right tone, so you don't give off unintentional cues. You should always ask yourself, is this how I would like members of my family treated?

- **Stay open-minded:** Make sure staff feel comfortable approaching you with ideas or concerns. They may have experiences you are not aware of or may have brainstormed other strategies. You should consider their thoughts and attend to them respectfully, even when busy. When dealing with members of

the public and problems surface, on some occasion asking them for their thoughts may assist.

4. Embrace the Uniqueness of Each Employee

One of the most important things to improve communication and employee engagement at your workplace is embracing each employee's unique communication style. That means you need to learn about their preferred communication channels and style. Then, tailor your communication methods to their select style.

5. Have One-on-One Interactions

To improve communication, you need to be intentional about workplace relationships. Schedule one-on-one meetings with your team members. These meetings show staff that you value them and are willing to connect with them more personally. Remember timid or reserved staff tend to be more open and share valuable information and feedback in private settings.

6. Schedule Weekly Team Meetings

To foster good communication amongst team members, schedule weekly meetings where employees can speak their minds. Team leaders can meet with staff to review each week's accomplishments, challenges, and concerns. They can also set goals and tasks for the following week and even discuss big-picture ideas. You can also take a step further by documenting important conversations and sharing recaps to clarify points and help the team remember recommendations and action points.

7. Make Time for exchanging information.

Team building activities often create a dynamic working environment, where people feel safe and build their confidence. So, get creative, it might be the case that team meetings take place inside a coffee shop or over morning tea. Team members will

loosen up and improve communication and team collaboration, promoting employee retention.

8. Show Appreciation

Organisations with engaged and content staff are 23% more productive than those with miserable employees. To move closer to achieving your goals as an organisation, you need to appreciate employees and show you care. Thank them for their brilliant ideas or for completing a task quickly. And that includes homing in on exactly what made you appreciative, it will show that you're genuine. For instance, you can say, "You did great, highlighting in your last witness interview.

9. Get a Team Communication App

Without good team communication, there will be miscommunications, especially since many organisations are now hybrid or remote. But with team communication platforms, employees can communicate, stay up to date and collaborate on projects. They can meet to carry out their tasks, share relevant information and discuss upcoming tasks. Communication apps include project management tools, video conferencing tools and voice-over-internet-protocol services.

10. Organise Communication Training Sessions

Consider holding regular communication training sessions so that both team leaders and employees can grasp basic communication skills that improve workplace communication. Hold training sessions physically or meet online over Google Meet or Zoom or any other communication platform. You can also use webinar tools for training so that old and new employees can always access them.

Bottom Line

Communication in the workplace should exceed exchanging information. It should include intentional communication exercises that enhance confidence, promote engagement and improve an organisation's overall productivity. So, irrespective of

who you are communicating with coworkers, team leaders, witness, victim, suspect
always be mindful of you communication styles.