

ENGLISH MANUAL



CHAPTER 09

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING



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■ FOCUSING ON A PERSONAL AGENDA

When we spend our listening time formulating our next response, we cannot be fully attentive to what the speaker is saying.

■ HEARING EMOTIONAL NOISE

We react emotionally to certain words, concepts and ideas, and to a myriad of other cues from speakers (appearance, non-verbal cues). Make a conscious effort to quiet your own emotional reactions so that you can listen properly.

■ CRITICIZING THE SPEAKER

Do not be distracted by critical evaluations of the speaker. Focus on what they are saying - the message - rather than the messenger.

■ UNDERSTANDING SPEECH RATE VS THOUGHT RATE

Speech rate (125 words per minute) is usually much slower than the rate at which we think (600-800 words per minute). You may need to focus on using that extra mental time to clarify and organize, in your mind, what the speaker is saying. Conversely, when the listener is communicating in a second language, it may be important for the speaker to slow down the rate of speech.

■ EXPERIENCING INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Too much stimulation or information can make it very difficult to listen with full attention. Try to focus on the relevant information, and the central points that are being conveyed.

■ HEARING EXTERNAL “NOISE”

Audible noise may be extremely distracting. Some things can be minimized – e.g., turn down the ringer on your phone, and the email beep on the computer while meeting with someone. Other noises may be unavoidable – e.g., construction, other people. Also, there may be figurative “noise” from the external environment, such as distracting

or inappropriate decor in a room, or environmental conditions (i.e., room is too hot or cold).

■ EXPERIENCING PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY

Feeling physically unwell, or experiencing pain can make it very difficult to listen effectively. You may wish to communicate that this is not a good time, and reschedule the discussion. Otherwise, you may just need to concentrate even more on the task of listening.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

■ STOP

Focus on the other person, their thoughts and feelings. Consciously focus on quieting your own internal commentary, and step away from your own concerns to think about those of the speaker. Give your full attention to the speaker.

■ LOOK

Pay attention to non-verbal messages, without letting yourself be distracted. Notice body language and non-verbal cues to allow for a richer understanding of the speaker's point. However, avoid getting distracted from the verbal message.

■ LISTEN

Listen for the essence of the speaker's thoughts: details, major ideas and their meanings. Seek an overall understanding of what the speaker is trying to communicate, rather than reacting to the individual words or terms that they use to express themselves.

■ BE EMPATHETIC

Imagine how you would feel in their circumstances. Be empathetic to the feelings of the speaker, while maintaining a calm centre within yourself. You need not be drawn into all of their problems or issues, as long as you acknowledge what they are experiencing.

■ ASK QUESTIONS

Use questions to clarify your understanding, as well as to demonstrate interest in what is being said.