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Last updated on October 22, 2020 How would you feel if you shared a personal story and noticed that the person you were talking didn't really listen? You probably wouldn't be too excited. Unfortunately, this is the case for many people. Most individuals are not good listeners. They're good pretenders. The thing is, real listening requires work - more work than people are willing to invest. Quality conversation is about give and take. Most people, however, want to just give-their words, that is. Being on the receiving end as the listener may seem boring, but it's important. When you take care of someone and pay attention to what they say, it's a sign of care and respect. Hitch is that attending requires an act of will that sometimes goes against what our minds naturally do-roaming around aimlessly and think of whatnot, instead of listening—the greatest act of thoughtfulness. Without active listening, people often feel unheard of and unrecognized. That's why it's important for everyone to learn to be a better listener. What makes people poor listeners? Good listening skills can be learned, but first let's take a look at some of the things you might do that make you a bad listener.1. You want to talk to yourself, who doesn't? We all have something to say, don't we? But when you look at someone pretending to listen while all the time, they're mentally planning all the amazing things they'll say, it's a disservice to the speaker. Yes, maybe what the other person says is not the most exciting thing in the world. Yet they deserve to be heard. You always have the option to steer the conversation in a different direction by asking questions. It's okay to want to talk. It's perfectly normal, even. Remember, though, that when your tour comes around, you want someone to listen to you.2. You disagree with what is being saidThis is another thing that makes you an inadequate listener-hear something that you disagree with and immediately tuning out. Then you lie in wait so you can tell the speaker how wrong they are. You are eager to make your point and prove the speaker wrong. You think that when you speak your truth, others will know how wrong the speaker is, thank you for setting them straight, and encourage you to elaborate on what you have to say. Dream on. Disagreeing with your speaker, no matter how frustrating it may be, is no need to tune them out and ready yourself to spew your giddy rebuttal. By listening, you can actually collect an interesting nugget of information that you were previously unaware of.3 You do five other things while you are ListeningIt is impossible to listen to anyone while texting, reading, playing Sudoku, etc. But people do it all the time - I know I have. actually tried to balance my checkbook while pretending to listen to the person on the other line. It didn't work. I had to keep asking, what did you say? I can only admit this now because I rarely do it anymore. With work, I've managed to become a better listener. It takes a lot of concentration, but it's definitely worth it. If you really want to listen, then you must: listen! M. Scott Peck, MD, in his book The Road Less Travel, says you can't really listen to anyone and do something else at the same time. If you're too busy to actually listen, let the speaker know and make sure another time to talk. It's simple is it!4. You appoint yourself as a judge But you listen, you decide that the speaker doesn't know what they're talking about. As an expert, you know more. So what's the point of even listening? For you, the only sound you hear when you decide they're wrong is Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah! But before you bang that hammer, just know that you might not have all the necessary information. To do that, you'd have to really listen, wouldn't you? Also, make sure that you don't judge anyone by their accent, the way they sound, or the structure of their sentences. My father is almost 91. His English is sometimes a little broken and hard to understand. People mistakenly assume he doesn't know what he's talking about - they're completely wrong. My father is a very intelligent man who has English as his second language. He knows what he says and understands the language perfectly. Remember this when listening to a foreigner, or someone who might have difficulty putting their thoughts into words. Now you know some of the things that make for an inferior listener. If none of the points above resonate with you, great! You're a better listener than most. How to be a better listener for conversation's sake, though, let's just say that maybe you need some work in the listening department, and after reading this article, you decide to improve. So what are some of the things you need to do to make it happen? How can you be a better listener?1. Be awareA good listener is paying attention. They don't look at their watch, phone or think about their dinner plans. They are focused and attentive to what the other person says. This is called active listening. According to Skills You Need, active listening involves listening with all senses. In addition to giving the speaker full attention, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' listening – otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener. As I mentioned, it is normal for the mind to wander. After all, we are human beings. But a good listener will rein those thoughts back in as soon as they notice their Waning. I would like to note here that you can also listen to bodily signals. You might assume that if someone keeps looking at their watch or over their shoulder, their focus is not on the conversation. The key is just to pay attention.2. Use positive body languageYou can derive a lot from a person's body language. Are they interested, bored or anxious? The body language of a good listener is open. They lean forward and express curiosity in what is being said. Their facial expressions are either smiling, showing concern, conveying empathy, etc. They tell the speaker they're being heard. People say things for a reason – they want some kind of feedback. For example, you tell your spouse, I had a really hard day! and your husband continues to check his newsfeed while nodding his head. Not a good answer. But what if your husband were to look up with inquiring eyes, put his phone down, and say, Oh, no. What happened? How would that feel? The answer is obvious. According to Alan Gurney,'An active listener is fully aware of the speaker and ensures that they understand the information provided. You can't be distracted by an incoming call or Facebook status update. You have to be present and in the moment. Body language is an important tool to ensure that you do this. The correct body language makes you a better active listener and therefore more 'open' and receptive to what the speaker says. At the same time, it indicates that you are listening to them. 3. Avoid interrupting SpeakerI am sure you don't want to be in the middle of a sentence only to see the other person holding a finger or mouth open, ready to step into your unfinished word spout. It's rude and causes anxiety. You would most likely feel a need to rush what you say just to finish your sentence. Interruption is a sign of disrespect. It is essential to say what I have to say is far more important than what you say. When you disconnect the speaker, they feel frustrated, rushed, and indifferent. Interrupting a speaker to agree, disagree, argue, etc., causes the speaker to lose track of what they say. It's extremely frustrating. Whatever you have to say can wait until the other person is done. Be polite and wait your turn!4. Ask questions Ask questions is one of the best ways to show that you're interested. If someone tells you about their ski trip to Mammoth, don't answer with, that's nice. It would show a lack of interest and disrespect. Instead, you might ask: How long have you been skiing? Did you have a hard time learning? What was your favorite part of the trip? Etc. The person will think aloud about you and consider you a great conversation just by asking a few questions.5. Just ListenThis may seem illogical. When you talk someone, it is usually back and forth. At times, all that is required of you is to listen, smile or nod your head, and your speaker will feel that they are really being heard and understood. I once sat with a client for 45 minutes without saying a word. She came into my office in need. I made her sit down and then she started crying softly. I sat with her - that's all I did. At the end of the session, she stood, told me that she felt much better, and then left. I have to admit that 45 minutes without saying a word was hard. But she didn't need me to say anything. She needed a safe space where she could emote without interruption, judgment, or me trying to fix something.6. Remember and Follow UpPart for being a great listener is to remember what the speaker has said to you, then follow up with them. For example, in a recent conversation you had with your colleague Jacob, he told you that his wife had gotten a promotion and that they were considering moving to New York. Next time you run into Jacob, you can say, Hey, Jacob! What happened to your wife's promotion? Jacob wants to know that you heard what he said and that you're interested in seeing how it went. What a gift! According to new research, people who ask questions, especially follow-up questions, can become better managers, land better jobs, and even win second dates. It's so easy to show you care. Just remember a few facts and follow up on them. If you do it regularly, you'll make more friends.7. Keep confidential information confidentialIf you really want to be a better listener, listen carefully. If what you hear is confidential, keep it that way, no matter how tempting it may be to tell someone else, especially if you have friends in common. Being a good listener means being trustworthy and sensitive with shared information. What is told in confidence is not to be revealed. Assure your speaker that their information is safe with you. They will feel relieved that they have someone with whom they can share their burden without fear of it coming out. Keeping someone's trust helps deepen your relationship. Also, one of the most important elements of confidentiality is that it helps to build and develop trust. It potentially allows for a free flow of information between the customer and the worker and recognises that a customer's personal life and all the problems and problems they have belong to them. Be like a therapist: listen and withhold judgment. NOTE: I must add here that while therapists keep everything in a session confidential, there are exceptions: If the customer may be an immediate danger to themselves or others. If the client brings a population that cannot protect itself, as in the case of a child or elder abuse. 8. Maintain eye contactA time someone is they usually say something they consider meaningful. They don't want their listener reading a text, looking at their fingernails, or bending down to pet a pooch on the street. A speaker will have all eyes on them. It lets them know that what they say has value. Eye contact is very powerful. It can convey many things without anything being said. At the moment, covid-19 pandemic is more important than ever. People can't see your whole face, but they can definitely read your eyes. By eye contact I don't mean a hard, creepy stare-just a glance in the speaker's direction will do. Make it a point the next time you're in a conversation to maintain eye contact with your speaker. Avoid the temptation to see anywhere but on their face. I know it's not easy, especially if you're not interested in what they're talking about. But like I said, you can redirect the conversation in a different direction or just let the person know you have to get started. Finally, ThoughtstLysis will attentively add to your connection with someone in your life. Now, more than ever, when people are so disconnected because of smartphones and social media, listening skills are critical. You can build better, more honest and deeper relationships by simply being there, paying attention, and asking questions that make the speaker feel like what they have to say questions. And isn't that a big goal? To make people feel like they matter? So go out and start honing these listening skills. You have two good ears. Use them now! More tips on how to be a better ListenerFeatured photo credit: Joshua Rodriguez via unsplash.com unsplash.com

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