



Introduction: Above is a diagram of two-way communication. Two-way communication is the transfer of a message (thought, idea, feeling) from one person (the sender) to another person (the receiver) with a response (feedback) to let the sender know that the message has been understood. Interference, such as noise, a language barrier, a lack of listening skills and other barriers can interfere with the communication process. A lack of effective communication skills is one of the main reasons why people lose their jobs.

Active Listening Skills

What are some skills we can develop to become better listeners? First, focus on the message. Remove emotional filters, such as “I’ve heard that before,” “I don’t think this applies to me,” “Who are you to tell me...”

Concentrate on the sender’s nonverbal signals, facial expressions--such as raising of the eyebrows, body language, such as folding arms across one’s chest, tone of voice, etc. These nonverbal signals can contribute a lot to the message being given. Some studies show that listeners rely most heavily on body language and expression to discover someone’s real feelings. Next we rely on their tone of voice. Only then do we rely on the words being spoken.

Acquiring active listening skills will help prepare you to be a better worker. Listening will be of paramount importance when you join the workforce. You will need to listen to your supervisor give instructions. You will have to interact with coworkers and, perhaps, customers. You will need to negotiate with others to solve problems or reach decisions. You may need to convey messages. All of these situations require that you use active listening skills.

Remember to keep a positive attitude. Listen to the entire message; think before you respond. Everyone has a choice when responding to a message--to react positively or to react negatively. You may have to change your attitude in order to get the most out of messages.

Constructive Feedback

Provide constructive feedback. Ask for clarification. Take notes. Ask for a demonstration. Ask for examples. Keep asking questions until you are sure you understand the message. As you paraphrase (return the message using different words), do you get understanding nods back? Use nonverbal signals to let the sender know you are listening. Nod your head occasionally. Maintain eye contact. Lean in slightly toward the speaker. Respond verbally, i.e., “yes,” “I understand,” “I see...”

1. Constructive feedback **describes** behavior rather than evaluates behavior.
“**Tapping your pencil** while I am explaining this procedure makes me nervous.”
2. Constructive feedback describes **specific** behaviors.
“You arrived at work **15 minutes late this morning.**”
3. Constructive feedback shows **consideration** for the receiver.
“You arrived at work 15 minutes late this morning. **Is there a problem** which is preventing you from getting to work on time?”
4. Constructive feedback focuses on **behavior** that the receiver can modify.
“Thank you for sharing with us, John. Could we hear from some of the other members regarding this issue?”
5. Effective constructive feedback includes **listening to what the receiver has to say.**
“I understand where you are coming from.”

Putting it All Together

Putting it all together comprises communication. A large part of your working life will be devoted to communication. Some sources say that over 50% of your time will be spent listening to others. The quality of your listening and feedback skills will determine in large part how successful you are on the job.