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'Anyone who negotiates anything, should have a copy on their desk.' *Michael Ogilvie, Senior Partner, OBC accountants*

WIN



WIN

How to get a winning result
from persuasive negotiations

DEREK ARDEN

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9.

Listen well

In this chapter you will learn:

- Why listening is so important.
- How to stay focused and listen.
- What to do if you are distracted.
- What to do if they are distracted.
- What key words to listen for.
- How to interpret the way they are saying it.

Why is listening so important?

As a negotiator, you need to be a good listener. In fact, I would say you need to be a really good, first-class listener.

You need to understand clearly where the other party is coming from: what they want, what they do not want, their agendas, their hidden agendas and everything there is to know that can be known.

If you are really determined to become a serious negotiator, then first you must become a serious listener.

You will be a better negotiator if you listen well because you will have more information, facts and views at your disposal to make more informed negotiating decisions.

Listening is one of the most difficult skills to do accurately. It needs all of our senses to be employed, to get an accurate picture. You are talking about the ability to listen to what people are saying, what they really mean and what they are not saying. In any negotiation, active disciplined listening is a critical success factor: the ability to really hear what the person is saying.

Generally, most people are poor listeners, most of the time. 'Why is this?' you might ask. You are too busy to listen properly. You rush

around and therefore listening is inconvenient. You think you know what the issue is, what the problem is, what the opportunities are and, therefore, you are already preparing your answers. Perhaps you want to avoid boredom.

However, before you get too involved in the practice of listening, you must remember you are listening to the whole person. You are listening to the words, the way they are said, the confidence or the hesitation, the tonality, the body language and what, perhaps, is not said.



WARNING! THE DANGERS OF NOT LISTENING

- You will miss key information, which will affect the outcome of your negotiation.
- If someone thinks you are not listening to them, they will treat you with less respect and tell you less information.
- You may make wrong assumptions.

Listen with your two eyes and your two ears and speak only with one mouth.

Listen to the language they use, the words they use, the way they say it, the body language that accompanies the words that re-enforce the message or are incongruent to the message.

If you want a great example of hearing without listening, look at this video showing the US Navy misunderstanding a situation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvRYd8U7qGY>.

The point is that listening means asking questions to clarify and really understand the issues.

Good negotiators are good listeners. Great negotiators are great listeners!

What is the difference between hearing and listening? *Hearing* is the sounds and the words.

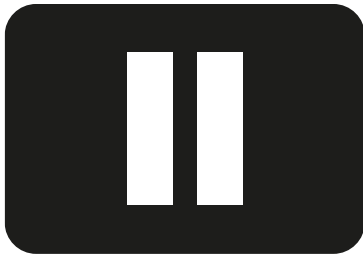
Listening is the meaning of what the person is saying.

How to stay focused and listen

You might think that you do not have to learn how to listen, but listening skills are far from easy. Active listening needs concentration and total focus.

The average person speaks at around 150 to 200 words per minute. However, as some people can think at up to more than 800 words per minute, this leaves a lot of space for head-chatter in our mind.

Figure 9.1



PAUSE

A good idea here is to pretend you have a pause button, like on your audio device or computer and imagine you have pressed it. The pause button controls your inner self-talk and your outer verbal talk.

Get in the zone

Before you start listening you should put yourself in a heightened state of awareness:

1. Sit up straight. Be alert and concentrate on the person who is speaking.
2. Mirror and match their body language.
3. Stay silent.
4. Ignore head chatter.

Listen actively

To listen accurately you have to remain silent with your outer voice (what you are saying) and your inner voice (what you are thinking).

1. Switch your attention to them – concentrate 100 per cent on the person speaking.
2. Listen to what is being said and what is not being said.
3. Listen to how they are saying what they are saying.
4. Watch their body language.
5. Use silence to good effect – sometimes not saying something can make them speak more.
6. Use what you hear to ask questions – ‘Is there anything else?’

TIP TOP TIP!

Keep a small note on your pad to remind yourself to listen *acutely*.

Avoid jumping to conclusions

Listening to somebody without passing judgement is a great skill.

This means listening but not interpreting what you hear, according to your own life experiences. Humans have a natural tendency to form judgements about people and issues, due to what has happened to us as individuals in the past and the way we have been brought up by our parents or by people who have influenced us at various ages and stages of our development.

For example, our own moral standards could influence how we hear what is being said.

Remember to stay silent with your mouth and listen accurately with your mind.

TIP TOP TIP!

When I am coaching executives to listen in key negotiations, I remind them that *listen* is an anagram of *silent*. They have to remain totally silent not only by avoiding speaking but by avoiding thinking about what they are going to say next.

What if you are distracted?

The real problem that most people have is that listening is a choice. You choose whether you think the message is important and you need to get it right. When you are negotiating, the message is always important because it gives us vital information.

If you are negotiating, then there is no point not listening. If the message is not important, you should ask yourself 'Why am I here?'

Here are just a few reasons why you might be distracted from listening effectively in a negotiation situation:

- You are preoccupied with our own thoughts.
- The other person says something that triggers other thoughts in our mind.
- You are bored by the other person. Anchors and triggers are programmed into us by the experiences of life. Something someone says or does can remind us of something that happened to us in the past and start a train of thought in our mind.
- You do not block out other sounds and noises.
- You have biases, appearances, facts you know about people to cloud your information.
- You are in a hurry – to finish a project or to get to a meeting.
- You have a closed mind to the subject.
- In a meeting, you tune people out because you think they never have a good idea or you just do not like them.
- You do not like what you are hearing.
- Stress (this is one of the biggest reasons why people do not listen).

One of the major difficulties of listening is head chatter. Head chatter is when you have other thoughts and ideas going on in your mind.

Examples of head chatter might be: 'Why is he wearing that ridiculous tie?' 'What am I going to get for dinner?' 'He reminds me of one of my brother's friends.' 'Does she really think that power dressing suit will impress us?'

Here are the key steps to avoid distractions:

1. Focus on the person who is talking.
2. Put away any equipment, such as a mobile device.
3. If on the telephone, blank your computer screen.
4. If in an open plan area, ignore anybody going by.
5. Sit upright, with positive body language.
6. Do not think about what you are going to say next.
7. Do not think about how you are going to respond in advance.

TIP TOP TIP!

Remember that listening is a choice you make.

RAPID REPEAT METHOD

Rapid repeat is a method of listening that can help you stay focused. It is very simple and it works. Simply repeat silently in your mind what is being said, a fraction of a second after it has been said. This holds your concentration and improves your recall of what was said.

Many governments are thinking about how they might have to change laws relating to juries. Why?

It has been discovered that jurors have lost the ability to listen with all the distractions of the internet, television, social media and all the other new twenty-first-century distractions.

Recently, the Lord Chief Justice in the United Kingdom said, 'You have a generation now in the jury box, totally unused to sitting and listening. That changes the whole tradition of aurality with which you are familiar.'

Researchers are suggesting that jurors might be given monitors to take away and they might be able to press buttons to obtain information that they wanted clarification on.

What if they are distracted?

How can you tell if someone is listening to you?

By reading the other person's body language, you can tell quickly how well the negotiation is going and decide what you need to do next. It is important to pay attention to their body language and keep them engaged, because you want their full attention if you are going to persuade them well.

Check their body language

Body language is covered in Chapter 11, but it is easy to tell via a person's body language whether they are listening to you or not.

Good signs that mean they are listening:

- *Open arms* – this means they are receptive to what you are saying.
- *Comfortable eye contact* – if they pay attention to where you are looking then you have got their attention.
- *Sitting forward* – if they are leaning forward in your direction, they are intent on you.

How can you tell if someone is not listening to you?

If someone is not listening to you, it will also be clear from their body language.

Bad signs that mean they are not listening:

- *Crossed arms* – this implies the person is likely not to be listening to the arguments. Now, of course, this is not always the case. They may be uncomfortable, they may be cold, and they may have some real issues on their mind.
- *Poor eye contact*.
- *Too much eye contact* – sometimes people who are not telling the truth or misleading people hold *too much* eye contact when talking to people. Around two seconds is the norm for good contact, but this varies from person to person.

- *They look distracted* – they are doing other things, such as checking their electronic devices.
- *They are distracted* – you can hear a keyboard in the background.

When they are on the telephone, many people think they can cover up not listening and do other things, check emails and not listen, and get away with it. This is far from the truth. To listen accurately you must give 100 per cent concentration. I survey people in my masterclasses and ask this question: ‘Can you tell when someone is not listening to you on the telephone?’ Almost 95 per cent of people say they can.

As well as what they are doing *physically*, you should think about how their body language relates to what they are saying. Consider: is what they are saying congruent with what they are doing physically? Do the words match the body language? For example, if they are saying that something is true, do they look like they believe it is true? Signs for them not believing it could be nose rubbing, fidgeting, going red, change of skin colour, perspiration. Or are they saying they are happy with the deal, but are looking extremely frustrated?

Are they behaving differently when you talk? If their body language changes completely between when they speak and when they listen, beware. This could mean a number of things. If it is confident, it might mean they are thinking they have done better than they had thought previously. If it is less confident, it could mean they have some concerns about what they have just promised. Can they deliver it?

What we need to do is spot the changes. When we see changes then we might choose to dig deeper with further questions, drawing out more information to make our decision.

What do I do if someone is not listening?

If your fellow negotiator is not listening to you, it is important to do something to get their attention back to the negotiation. Do something for effect, do something different, ‘a pattern interrupt’, as the psychologists say – to re-energise and bring the person back into the room.

Feel free to address the issue by saying, 'Why don't we take a five-minute break?' Other physical things you could do are: pour some coffee, order some food, open a window, change the way you are sitting.

What key words should I listen for?

When you are listening carefully in a negotiation you will hear key words. Key words could be:

- 'My *normal* price is . . .'
- 'You do not *usually* give discounts.'
- 'It is going to be *difficult* to do that.'
- 'Our policy is almost always . . .'
- 'Only head office can agree . . .'
- 'The manager is the only one with the authority.'
- 'You need a discount facility.'

In the first two cases the key words are *normal* and *usually* and, in the other cases, the question to ask is – *why?*

So I might retort –

'It is our policy not to pay the normal price, we normally expect to get a discount. It is our policy.'

OR – 'We usually insist on discounts.'

OR – 'Why is it going to be difficult? How can you help get round this?'

There are many other keywords to watch out for, depending on the circumstances.

Here are examples of some of them:

- 'At the moment or at the present time we cannot move our position.'
- 'We have a special price coming up.'
- 'It is difficult to move on our current offer.'
- 'This is today's deal.'

In all these cases dig down a bit deeper to see in what circumstances they might be able to move their position.

How are they saying it?

The way people say things is very important. The voice tonality, the emphasis they put on certain words.

Listen for tremors in their voice, which indicate nervousness or lying. Hesitancy probably means they are unsure, as might a stutter when the person does not normally stutter. A soft confident voice could mean they are sure of themselves, whereas the loud bullying type of voice might mean they are not sure.

If they sound vague, probably they are not sure of themselves or the issue you are negotiating. Some people sound scripted. If they are scripted, you can bet they are not listening to your concerns.

Some people are in roles which need to sound assertive: police officers, lawyers, etc. Make sure they are not role-playing what they expect people to hear and check, by asking more questions, whether they really have the facts.

The key, again, is to notice these issues.

REMEMBER TO ASK YOURSELF TO WAIT

WAIT stands for 'Why am I talking?'

You cannot listen and talk. When you find yourself talking, ask yourself, 'Why am I talking?'

Whenever you are negotiating, and remember that everything ends up as a negotiation at some stage, don't forget: 'People who care listen – and people who listen care.' Therefore, if you listen, the other side will like you more and, if they like you, they are likely to tell you more, let you into their secrets, and that means, generally, you will be able to negotiate better agreements, nearer to our goal of win win win negotiation.

Listening is such an important subject in negotiating. By really listening you are discovering where the other side is coming from,

what they want, whether there are any hidden agendas, all before you make your offer or change your position.

Try this exercise.

EXERCISE

Ask a friend to talk for one minute; you are not allowed to interrupt. You must listen 100 per cent. Then, after a minute, repeat back to that person what they said.

Then swap places and repeat the exercise so your friend can have a turn.

Most people find this exercise very difficult and quite tiring. The benefits are that it makes you really concentrate on the actual words, the way they are saying them and the body language. You have to practise active, disciplined listening.

TIP TOP TIP!

Remember that most people want a good listening to, not a good talking to.

Recap

- Listen carefully in any negotiation; you will be surprised what you hear.
- *Listen* is an anagram of *silent*. During the negotiation, listen by remaining silent in your head and with your mouth. Take care with any head chatter.
- Make sure you are listening to what the other person is really saying, the real message. That will double your chances of a successful negotiation result.



Derek Arden is a leading negotiation expert. An international keynote conference speaker, business coach and facilitator, he has worked in 27 countries, with 5 business schools and has been a visiting lecturer at the Henley Management College for 12 years.

Derek was a Director in a large profit centre of a financial institution for 12 years and has negotiated transactions worth £3bn.

‘Everything you need to know for successful negotiation – and how to do it.’

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