

The Many Benefits of Listening

Listening well is a profitable and worthwhile activity

PEOPLE WHO TRULY LISTEN UNDERSTAND that effective listening provides solid, reliable benefits. Listening expands your knowledge, helps best solve problems, aids in negotiations, reduces mistakes and misunderstandings, and enables that nirvana of all business situations: enhanced relationships with prospects and clients. And where do all these benefits ultimately lead? More recognition, greater income, increased market share, and higher profitability.



Expand your knowledge. No one knows everything. You can certainly learn from reading, but when you listen to someone, you get consolidated information that goes to the heart of the matter. The talker has already discarded the useless and minimized the peripheral. You get the true nuggets of what's most important. As you react, this talker can tailor what they are saying, explain something in greater detail. You can ask questions to gain more insight and depth. You can also learn things that have not yet been written down.

Everyone has something to say... if you just listen long enough. My teenage daughter, Alita, once had a piano teacher, Mrs Regis (not her real name, of course). While brilliant on a piano, what Mrs Regis said during a conversation could be quite incomprehensible. Picking up Alita after practice often meant enduring more of Mrs Regis's flighty thoughts. Alita and I tried listening, but we always seemed to come away wide-eyed and baffled. I often questioned the value of

listening to her, until one enlightening moment that completely changed my perspective.

My family was joining me for a six-month sabbatical I was taking in Hawai'i, so I phoned Mrs Regis and told her that Alita's lessons would have to end. The next time I saw Mrs Regis, she said to me, "So, you're taking a sabbatical?" When I affirmed this, she said something to me that I will never forget: "Let's see, that's rest, relaxation, rejuvenation, and reinvention." Well, I just stared at her, stunned. In one neat, sweet, and pithy phrase, she captured the essence of my sabbatical. Just like that. These four alliterative words became a foundation on which I built my sabbatical.

Everyone, and I mean everyone, has something to say. Sabastian Junger, the novelist (*A Perfect Storm*) and journalist built a career on this. In his article "Welcome Stranger", published in *Adventure* magazine, Junger wrote, "Every person I've interviewed has lead a life unique to them, they have something to say about the world that I couldn't get from anyone else. That became a cornerstone of my journalism."

Better solve problems. To solve a problem, it's best to know everything about the situation. Wouldn't that be wonderful — to solve a problem about which you know everything? While that is impossible, the next best thing is to know as much as possible. And the best way to gain that information is to listen. The longer you listen, the more information you receive, the greater your understanding, the better you are able to solve a problem. At some point, however, you must stop listening, use the information you have, and act.

Negotiate better terms. Have you ever stated a negotiated position that was immediately accepted and realized that you could have received better terms? Taking the time to listen and discovering the other side's tolerance helps you obtain a more favorable position.

Reduce mistakes and misunderstandings. You certainly don't want to be the manager who half listened (literally, it appears) and shipped a truckload of product to Portland, Maine when it should have gone to Portland, Oregon (true story).

Be better understood. To be better understood, first listen. Does this appear paradoxical? On the surface it does, but after you truly listen to someone, they are much more likely to return the favor — and listen more intently to you, mirroring your behavior. And what if they don't? You can always point out that you made the effort to listen, and would appreciate the same in return. As a bonus, both of you understand each other at a deeper level.

I once had a client who had to dump everything on her mind before she could listen. It wasn't always easy to be patient and wait her out; sometimes there were 30 second pauses between her thoughts. I learned to just keep quiet, listen, and wait for her to completely finish. How did I know? She would wonder aloud why I hadn't said anything yet! But that was okay because now, she was ready to listen. And she really did listen well, now that she was "empty". We always accomplished a lot during our conversations, and attained many accords.

People like a listener. Think about it. The person you are most likely to tell your innermost secrets is someone you know well and trust, someone with whom you have built a relationship. Relationships are built through many human attributes — at the core of these attributes is listening. 🌍

— RICH MAGGIANI

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