

Personality Traits of an Exceptional Listener

Your character has much to do with your ability to listen and people's willingness to talk to you

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT what is going on in your company; about your staff; about your prospects and clients? Then all you have to do is listen.

Ah, but listening is not easy. If it were, more people would do it with verve. But it is just that difficulty that sets those who truly listen apart, and elevates them in the mind of others. People will seek you out because they know you will take the time to truly listen to them. Given that place of honor in their circle of colleagues means that



you discover more information faster, are more of a confidant, and gain a deeper association with those around you.

Listening is good for business. How? People feel free to tell you what is really going on in the company, and do not feel they have to gloss over it. And it's just this kind of in-depth truth that helps you solve problems when they are still small.

There are a number of characteristics to becoming an exceptional listener that are easily within your reach: humility, patience, respect, sincerity, and empathy. You have varying levels of these traits in your character; it just takes a bit of focus to bring them out.

Humility, the misunderstood trait. Probably the most important trait is humility. This seems like a rare trait in business, one that is all too often perceived as weakness. Humility doesn't mean that you are unintelligent. All humility says is that you don't know everything, or even every perspective, and that you are willing to admit to

that. Listening allows you to receive information that your ego might have already assumed you knew. But you don't. How could you? No one knows everything. Try this: listen as if your perspective is wrong; think about the different perspective you would take based on what others tell you. Taking this approach can help you gain a deeper understanding of a crucial issue.

Understanding an issue from another's perspective — taking the second position — is a trait that sets exceptional listeners apart. Listening from the other person's perspective gains you immeasurable insight into the issue, gains deeper rapport, and can even — gasp! — get you to modify your position or change your mind, even if it's just a little bit. And to what gain? Clarity.

Patience is a virtue. Or so my mother used to endlessly tell me. However you feel about that cliché, patience truly is a virtue when applied to listening. You must learn to — frankly — shut up! This allows people to talk, allows them to think, allows them to finish their entire thought. When you are quiet, the more people talk — and the more information you get. As Samuel Johnson once blithely stated, "Never miss an opportunity to keep your mouth shut."

Embrace the pregnant pause. Be comfortable with the silence. Be still. Wait quietly.

Awareness. Just by reading this series of position papers on listening makes you a better listener, simply because you are more aware of the value of listening. When you are aware of your surroundings, you'll be more attuned to when others are telling you something important or relating something that you ought to know. Give them that chance. Just think what you might learn.

Listening demonstrates respect. When you truly listen to someone, you are telling them that they are important, that they have something to say. And when you give respect, you get respect.

Sincerity and empathy. These traits help you connect with people at a deeper level. When people feel that you are genuine and understand their feelings, they feel more secure to tell you the whole truth and complete story.

Listeners are exceptional people. I was once in a conversation with several people. Everyone seemed to be talking at once. Mentally, I took a step back and simply watched the process. As it roiled on, I realized no one was actually listening; that they were all trading stories. How did I know? The same points were made more than once, and no one realized it. Except for one woman: Tracy. She simply moved her head from speaker to speaker. Finally, when everyone had exhausted themselves, one said to Tracy, "Gee Tracy, you haven't said much." Actually, she hadn't said anything at all! "I'm sure you have something to say about this." And everyone became silent awaiting Tracy's response. She said, "I've been so busy listening to you all that I haven't taken the time to compose a response." Then she proceeded to summarize all that had been said so far, and by whom. I'll never forget that, and neither did the other people in the group. Later, I discovered that Tracy was the person others sought out when they wanted to be listened to. Imagine what she learned.

Getting there. So, you are not quite there with these personality traits? That's okay; you just need to work on it. Be attuned to how people talk to you, and adjust to be more receptive. Listening is a skill that can be learned, and like any skill, it takes time and a focused effort that is truly worthwhile. 🌟

— RICH MAGGIANI

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