

# Communicating with Two Ears and One Mouth

How to master the important art of listening

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**"We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen more than we say." —[Zeno of Citium](#)**

**LISTENING:** It's one of the most important parts of communication, and Communication is an important part of leadership.

**SO** why do so many of us fail miserably at it?

Listening is not just hearing, or perceiving sounds. Hearing doesn't encompass comprehending.

Listening is not just reading. Reading also doesn't necessarily include comprehending. We're constantly reading e-mails and written "information provided by others," but too often, we don't truly understand the messages others are trying to convey.

Listening is about tuning out distractions and tuning in to what is important.

Listening is about cluing in to the information provider's nonverbal behaviors to understand the message beyond the message seen or heard on the surface—to grasp what lies beneath. (Listening is also about knowing when there is no other information beyond what's on the surface so there's no need to dig deeper for hidden messages.)

Listening can be one of the hardest things to do consistently, but it can be mastered with practice.

There are many reasons many of us have not yet mastered the art of listening.

One reason: We don't tune out distractions, both external (e.g., all the texts popping up on our phones while we sit in meetings) and internal (i.e., all those thoughts in our heads).

Another: We don't want to listen. We're afraid of what we might discover beneath the surface if we really listen. By paying closer attention, we might find out we got something wrong when we really hoped we were right. Consider our relationships with others and how hard it can be to learn we were wrong about someone or something.

Yet another reason: We focus on getting our own voice heard. In today's world, we're conditioned to believe that's what it takes to get ahead and to get what we want.

Not listening can create mistrust among key stakeholders, colleagues and teams.

Not listening can perpetuate a culture in which organizational leaders are unreceptive to the views and opinions of their employees.

Not listening can make us miss key pieces of evidence (positive and negative)

Not listening can take us down error-filled paths, because we failed to heed warning signs.

Not listening can mean the difference between whether the Manager ultimately **SUCCEEDS** or fails.

Here's a quick test of your listening skills: What sentence was created with the all-caps, boldface words that you just read? Were you paying attention, comprehending—and listening?

**LISTENING: so Management SUCCEEDS.**

Many of us struggle to listen. How can we improve our proficiency at listening?

Start by consistently practicing these key behaviors

- Listen actively and empathetically to others' views and concerns.
- Welcome the opportunity to hear competing points of view.
- Don't take criticism personally.
- Seek further information to clarify ambiguity.
- Respond promptly to others' communications.
- Take time to interpret and understand the context of, motives for and reasoning in received communications.
- Practice what you preach.
- Remember to pause and let others finish what they have to say before you plow ahead to provide the information you want others to listen to.

Take some time in the next week to assess how well you listen. Engage in the above behaviors more frequently than you do now. See what differences result in your communications with others.