

DISCOVER HOW TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

By: Carole Spiers

About The Author

Carole's credibility is rooted in 20 years success as CEO of a leading UK stress management consultancy, working with equal success both in the UK and the Gulf. She is a world authority on corporate stress and BBC Guest Broadcaster.

Carole is an international motivational speaker, and a weekly columnist for prominent newspapers. Carole's new book 'Show Stress Who's Boss!' is available <http://www.showstresswhosboss.co.uk> where you will receive a signed copy of the book + FREE stress test card. In UAE, you will find the book in all good bookshops.

Contact Carole to deliver her motivation presentation Articulate Dialogue Drives Corporate Growth at your next Conference or Seminar: info@carolespiers.co.uk. www.carolespiers.co.uk

- Do you ever feel awkward in conversation with others – either at work or at home?
- Are there times when you are at a complete loss as what to say next?
- Have you ever been accused of interrupting or finishing other people's sentences for them?

IF SO, YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Being a good conversationalist is an art. For some, it comes naturally and the words flow without effort but for many others, it is often a challenge. These inter-personal skills can be learnt and here are some tips to help you become a better communicator

YOUR TOP LISTENING TIPS
1. BE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN THE OTHER PERSON

This is not to say that the conversation should become a cross-examination with you firing questions like a machine-gun, but if you are really interested in the other person, what they have to say and what they do, then this will encourage an empathy and they will 'open-up' to you.

- 2. BE EMPATHIC AND NON-JUDGEMENTAL**
- You can be accepting and respectful of the other person and their feelings and beliefs without invalidating or giving up your own point of view or without agreement with the accuracy and validity of their view.

- 3. CONCENTRATE ON WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING**
- When listening to someone, do you often find yourself thinking about something else e.g. a job you need to do, a deadline etc and in the middle of the conversation, you realise that you haven't heard a word the person has said? If you have been listening attentively, you should be able to repeat back the conversation from the person you have been listening to!

- 4. SEND THE NON-VERBAL MESSAGE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING**
- When someone is talking to you, maintain eye to eye contact with that person. Show the speaker that you are listening by nodding your head. This will indicate simple acceptance and not necessarily agreement and you can inject an occasional "mm-hmm", "OK", "I see"

- 5. AVOID ASSUMPTIONS**
- When listening, do you often make immediate judgements about what the person is saying and assume you know

exactly what the person is going to say next? If you do this, you are failing to interpret exactly what the speaker is telling you and your evaluation may have been too hasty.

- 6. ASK MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS**
- Ask open questions, 'what?', 'why?', 'when?', 'who?' and 'how?'. These questions will elicit an open response rather than a monosyllabic one e.g. 'Did you go out last night?', might just bring a response of 'Yes'. Instead, open the conversation with 'What did you do last night?'. 'How would you describe?', 'What do you think about?'. That 'open' question will bring about a response that you can build-upon and develop further.

- 7. AVOID GETTING DEFENSIVE**
- It is very easy to take what another person says personally when what they are saying is not meant to be personal. Attentive listening does not mean that you will always agree with the other party's point of view, but it does mean that you will try and listen to what the other person is saying without becoming overly defensive. Sometimes it is useful to say something like, 'I appreciate your point of view [so that the person feels heard] but I think we might have to disagree on this one'.

- 8. PRACTICE PARAPHRASING AND CHECK IT OUT**
- This technique is certainly an art and you really do have to be listening to be able to achieve it. This skill is the art of putting into your own words what you have thought you have heard being said and reflecting this back to the listener e.g. 'What I think I heard you say was that you had challenges with writing your business plan and I was wondering if I got this correct?' or 'I can see you are upset with this performance review, would you like to talk it through on another occasion?'

- 9. WATCH FOR FEELINGS**
- When you are listening, don't just concentrate on the words that are being said. The way that the person is standing, the tone of voice and inflection they are using and what the person is doing with their hands are all part of the message being said. A person looking down is probably embarrassed or shy. A person who raises their voice is probably angry or frustrated. People who make eye to eye contact and lean forward are probably exhibiting confidence.

- 10. GIVE POSITIVE COMMENTS**
- You can always find a reason to say something positive to someone and there is no easier way of getting someone else's attention than to deliver a compliment or flattering remark.

- 11. USE HUMOUR**
- Humour can be used to 'break the ice' with someone you've not met before. However, be aware that what is amusing in one culture, may not be so in another. Try telling a short personal story, with empathy and a smile. A genuine smile can be very disarming and a great 'ice-breaker'.

- 12. BUILD RAPPORT AND EMPATHY**
- If you can build rapport with the other party, you are half way home. Ask any successful salesperson. They are ones who know what it feels like to walk in the other person's shoes. The chances are that if the salesperson communicates a friendly, open attitude, rather than an aggressive one, you'll be more likely to buy from them because an initial relationship has been established. And we all like to buy from people who we like. And it is no different in a conversation.

- 13. Don't interrupt**
- Allow time to the conversation to continue without interruption and don't finish other people's sentences for them. You really don't know that they are going to say and if you hear the sound of your voice more than the sound of theirs, you are certainly not listening.

- 14. AVOID CONFRONTATION**
- When you are listening attentively to someone, try and avoid direct confrontational questions like 'You are joking', 'This is not so', 'Prove it', 'You're not right'. If you go down this route, you will put yourself in a position of taking sides and this is not listening!

KNOW WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

So next time, someone tells you that you are not listening to them, don't retaliate with 'It's not me, it's you!'. Maybe this is an opportune time to think about improving your skills. I know it's easy to say, 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks!' Well, the answer is, you can. We can all improve our listening skills, at whatever time and at whatever age.