



Listening Skills

If an employee comes to you with a problem, listen first. You will save time in the long run. Often, if the person has an opportunity to tell the whole story, the solution comes to light during the course of conversation. Also, some people just want to get a problem off their chest and you can provide the sounding board for this need. In some instances, you will have advice that may prevent the need for a formal grievance by helping the worker to handle the situation. Or, you may find that the person is complaining about something that happened much earlier and is no longer within the time limits allowed for a grievance. In the long run, you don't save time by immediately telling the member to file a grievance without first hearing what the person is concerned about.

Listening to management personnel is important, too. Not only will you learn more about the intent, authority and purpose of management decisions, but also, you will have time to sort out points that need to be stressed and decide strategy to be used. Particularly when talking with the boss, it is wiser to allow that person to do a lot of the talking.

The following suggestions for improving your listening skills are provided by the Institute of Labor Education and Research, New York:

1. **Stop talking --**
You can't listen while you are talking.
2. **Empathize with other person --**
Try to put yourself in the speaker's place so that you can see what he/she is trying to get at.
3. **Ask questions --**
when you don't understand, when you need further clarification, when you want to show you are listening. But don't ask

questions that will embarrass the person or show the person up.

4. **Don't give up too soon --**
and don't interrupt; give the person time to say what he/she has to say.
5. **Concentrate on what the person is saying --**
Actively focus your attention on the words, ideas, and feelings related to the subject.
6. **Look at the other person --**
Face, mouth, eyes, hands will all help to communicate with you.
7. **Leave your emotions behind (if you can) --**
Try to push your worries, your fears, your problems, outside the meeting room. They may prevent you from listening well.
8. **Control your anger --**
Try not to get angry at what you hear; your anger may prevent you from understanding what is said.
9. **Get rid of distractions --**
Put down any papers, pencils, etc. you have in your hands; they may distract your attention.
10. **Get the main points --**
Concentrate on the main ideas and not just the illustrative material; examples
(Continued)

and statistics, etc. are important, but usually are not main points. Examine them only to see if they prove, support, or define the main ideas.

11. Share responsibility for communications --

Only part of the responsibility rests with the speaker; you as the listener have an important part too.

12. React to ideas, not to the person --

Don't allow your reactions to the person to influence your interpretation of what he/she says. The ideas may be good even if you don't like the person.

13. Don't argue mentally --

It is a handicap to argue with the person mentally as he/she is speaking.

This sets up a barrier between the two of you.

14. Use the difference in rate --

You can listen faster than he/she can talk, so use this rate difference to your advantage by: anticipating what is going to be said, thinking back over what has been said, evaluating the development, etc. Rate difference: speech rate is about 100 to 150 words per minute: thinking is 250 to 500 words per minute. Be sure to use this time lag to reflect on what you are hearing, rather than using it to prepare your response -- you can't listen if you're talking, even if you're only talking in your head and not out loud.

Adapted from: Steward's Manual: Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Detroit, Michigan

Revised 10/21

