



# NICs

NETWORK INFORMATION CONNECTION, A TECHNICAL E-JOURNAL

## Are You Listening?

by DeniBerger

**H**ave you ever had a meeting with someone where you thought you are talking to the wall? Many times we find ourselves being distracted by or envisioning other projects especially when we're the ones that need to be listening. So how can you focus on the topic at hand and listen effectively?



First you might want to ask yourself, what interferes with effective listening? Here are a few things that can get in your way. You may be tired, have other things on your mind, or you may not enjoy the speaker that is presenting. In any case, there are ways that you can get past these roadblocks.

### Survey Says

Select Appointments North America conducted a survey among America's top executives to gather information about important job skills. They found that 80 percent of the executives polled rated listening as the most critical skill in business. Many believe technical skills are important, or other skills depending on the profession; however listening has been rated the most important. Why is such a simple trait so important? First and foremost, if we don't listen, we won't know what the task is at hand which makes it hard to get the job done right the first time.

### Acknowledge the Speaker

Be sure the speaker knows you are listening. You might say words like, Ok, Mmm hmm, Oh, Really, etc. Of course there will be times where you can't get a word in however, by acknowledging what the speaker is saying, you are more likely to actually listen as you will need to be concentrating so you can agree or disagree. If you are sitting in the same room as the person speaking, be sure to maintain eye contact as often as possible. Maintaining eye contact will assure the speaker that you are paying attention to him/her instead of focusing your attention on something else.

### Try Not to Interrupt

It is so easy to want to interrupt what is being said, especially if you disagree. Don't be Mr. Fixit. We often sit and try to have a rebuttal ready so we can snap right back. One tip is to count to three in your head before responding. This will give you time to actually gather your thoughts. In those three seconds you might even decide not to comment. One exception to this rule is if you have a ific question that will help you that will help you clarify what the speaker is trying to say.

### Take Notes

Another good tip is to take notes. Of course you don't need to write down everything, but it is nice to have the most important points on paper. I find this tip very beneficial in all aspects of my job. In staff meeting, I take notes and I'm always able to go back over those tasks I have been asked to carry out. It is also very beneficial to take notes when in a phone conversation. To be sure you understand all that





has been said, you can go over those notes you have taken and make changes to see the needs are met for the other person on the phone.

## Watch Your Tone and Your Body Language

When you are listening to someone, be sure to watch your body language. It is so easy to make faces that don't mean anything to you but do mean something to those around you. Also, watch your tone. Everyone has a different tone of voice and it is easy to misunderstand one's tone. Be careful to watch your tone so you don't sound arrogant or offend.

## Last But Not Least

Finally, summarize what the speaker said and be sure you understand. How many times have we all

assumed that we understand when really we don't? Try summarizing all of the most important points. Recently we had a staff meeting where we implemented new processes. While I just "knew" the new procedure, I found when we went back over and summarized, I learned much more about what was being implemented. More insights were given and specifics were laid out so we could all understand. We walked out of the meeting feeling like we all had a part in the project and we knew where we needed to go to make it work.

## In Summary

There are many different ways to better our listening skills. In summary, first know what interferes with your listening. Try to block out everything that gets in your way of sincerely listening to what is being said. Next, be sure the speaker knows he/she has your undivided attention. Third, don't interrupt and be sure to take notes. Fourth, be careful when using body language and watch your tone of voice. Finally, summarize with the speaker the main points of the conversation or speech. Be sure you both understand each other and you both are satisfied with the outcome. Happy Listening.



*Try the listening skills self-assessment below, taken from [www.languageatwork.com](http://www.languageatwork.com)*

## Time to test your skills

### Check all that apply:

- I know my purpose for listening
- I check at the end to see whether my original purpose was met
- I remember the main points of what I hear
- I stay focused on listening; I don't spend listening time planning my response
- I wait to hear the speaker's full message; I don't jump to conclusions or argue mentally
- I recognize and close out potential distractions to listening
- I clarify and summarize points of agreement or disagreement
- I attempt to follow the speaker's train of thought
- I judge the message on its content, not on the style or delivery of the speaker
- I provide feedback to the speaker and ask for more information if necessary
- I know that listening doesn't necessarily mean agreeing

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