

# Listening and Speaking

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Hearing and listening is not the same thing. Some people never learn this. Hearing is generally a physical act. The sound comes in through the ears and is heard. Listening, however, is a mental process that requires using the brain to process what is heard. Listening is vital to serving customers since you can not help someone if you do not know what their need is. Active listening is a skill that can be learned but must be practiced regularly in both work and personal communications if it is to be mastered.

## Skills

1. *Prepare to Listen*  
This involves knowing your product/service and your company's policies and procedures.
2. *Stop Talking and Listen*  
You cannot listen if you are talking. Do not be in a hurry or interrupt. Be patient and allow customers time to finish what they are saying. Sometimes they may pause, but give them time to think before jumping in with your solution. Pausing does not mean that they are finished with everything they had to say. Try not to interrupt, except for short questions, until you determine that they have reached their conclusion and you are able to identify what they want.
3. *Identify what the Customer Wants*  
This could involve a question about a product or policy, a complaint, or even just someone to talk to who will listen to them.
4. *Pay Attention to the Customer*  
Do not allow yourself to become distracted. (See Blocks to Effective Listening) Watch for non-verbal clues to their moods including the rate of their speech, pitch, volume, and voice quality. If the customer is standing before you, look for the way in which they are standing, gesturing, etc., as well as to try to determine how they are feeling.
5. *Give Feedback/Look and Act Interested*  
Give feedback to show whether you understand the message. Show them you are interested by looking at them, smiling, raising an eyebrow, occasionally nodding your head, and asking questions from time to time. When they finish speaking, try to summarize what they have told you and ask them if you have correctly understood them.

## Blocks to Effective Listening

*Distractions* include noises and other environmental factors, interruptions by other people, and competing thoughts that creep into your mind. Environmental factors can include the temperature of the room, the type of lighting, etc. Other interruptions can include ringing telephones, people coming in and out of the area, etc. In order to avoid these distractions it may help to move your discussion to another area.

*Emotional Blocks* are biases against the opinions or ideas expressed by the sender that block your understanding of their message. If you find that you do not agree with what the customer is saying (or complaining about), it is especially important that you listen carefully so that you can understand their need and find a way to meet it.

*Planning Your Response* before the customer finishes speaking can cause you to miss some of what they are saying. This can cause you to respond inappropriately. Listen to everything your customer has to say and listen for their conclusion before deciding how to respond to what they have said.

### **Speaking Skills**

- When speaking to inform – get right to the point by saying what you want to say clearly and concisely.
- When you are tense or nervous your customer can tell by your voice, which may sound shaky and high. Your voice will sound more relaxed if you speak in a medium, even tone.
- Keep a smile on your face, even when talking on the phone. Customers can tell just by the sound of your voice.