



## [DR. SHIRLEY'S CAREER CORNER]

By: DR. SHIRLEY A. WHITE  
President  
Success Images

Reprinted from the November 2008 issue of BIC

# Listening — A key to interpersonal success

During the past year, I have observed that a key misstep many individuals are taking, both professional and personally, is failing to practice active listening in their everyday interpersonal interactions. In fact, CLI, or “continuous listening improvement,” is needed among all age groups.

“To listen effectively is to reach clarity of understanding. To understand clearly is to respond appropriately. To respond appropriately is to enhance communication. To enhance communication is to support cooperation. To support cooperation is to improve morale. To improve morale is to increase job commitment. To increase job commitment is to focus on productivity. Listening is good business!”

The previous quotation from Diane Bone's book, “The Business of Listening,” is primary evidence that we all need to be good senders as well as good receivers. Isn't it interesting how some of us are so eager to talk, yet so reluctant to listen? The skills needed to improve listening are relatively simple to learn and execute. Perhaps the harder task is developing an active listening attitude. You do this by first understanding that listening is as powerful as speech. What someone says to you can be just as critical as what you have to say to them.

Listening is probably the most important and, yet, the most neglected dimension of communication. How often have you heard these statements: “You're not listening to me.” “Why don't you let me finish what I'm saying?” “If you'll only let me, I'll tell you!” “I may as well be talking to a brick wall!” “You just don't understand!” “But that's not what I said!” If

you hear any of these comments from others, perhaps it's true that you're not listening. Listening is the art of connecting with another person so you fully understand what they are saying and feeling. It is a vital and necessary skill needed in leading others and maintaining interpersonal relationships in all aspects of our lives.

Did you know people listen about five to 10 times as fast as they speak? In the time it takes the speaker to say 100 words, the listener has the capacity to hear 500-1,000 words. So, while the other person is talking, you may be listening with only a fraction of the capacity for attention. What can you do?

Let's take a look at five keys to active listening:

1. Pay attention. This step enables you to focus. Give the speaker your undivided attention. Stop what you're doing. Maintain good eye contact.

2. Stop talking. Most of us, depending upon the situation, can do two things at once. Unfortunately, listening is not one of them. You cannot listen when you are also talking. You will only be thinking about what you are going to say next instead of paying attention to what the other person is saying.

3. Be alert to nonverbal cues. Although it is critical to listen to what is being said, it is equally important to understand what is not being said. For example, while a person's verbal message may convey honesty and conviction, his or her gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice may convey doubt.

4. Avoid interrupting or finishing others' sentences. Interrupting and finishing another's statement can

be perceived as disrespectful and suggests you want to do all the talking instead of listening. Be patient. Allow time for the speaker to convey ideas and meaning.

5. Provide feedback. Ask questions and get confirmation and clarification. Examples such as the following can help enhance understanding: “So, you're saying...” “Let me make sure I understand...” “Let me see if I'm with you, you...” “If I heard you correctly, you...”

Herbert G. Lingren wrote, “I speak because I know my needs/I speak with hesitation because I know not yours/My words come from my life's experiences/Your understanding comes from yours/Because of this, what I say/And what you hear, may not be the same/So, if you will listen carefully/Not only with your ears/But with your eyes and with your heart/Maybe somehow, we can communicate.”

Effective listening can be the key to solving problems, reducing conflict, misunderstanding and unpleasantness, as well as enhancing your overall interpersonal communication. Additionally, the payoffs for improving your active listening skills are enormous. You will have fewer communication glitches, your relationships will improve, productivity and morale will increase in your organization, and you will be able to break through those barriers of poor listening to become a more effective and successful communicator professionally as well as personally.

**For more information on Dr. White's programs and publications, please contact her at (225) 769-2307 or visit [www.successimages.com](http://www.successimages.com). □**