

CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings

The Art of Listening: Part 2

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In the previous issue of CONNECTIONS, I discussed the fact that most of us do not listen as well as we could. This happens for four reasons:

1. A natural tendency to want to speak first and focus on our own agenda.
2. Negative perceptions regarding the speaker and/or topic.
3. Our ability to think much faster than someone can speak.
4. Emotional noise (e.g., words that arouse strong emotions), external noise (e.g., distractions that take place around us), internal noise (e.g., having our mind on something else) and cultural noise (e.g. communication between two individuals whose primary languages are different).

In addition, I described the two key aspects of effective listening: understanding the message being sent by your communication part-

ner in the way that they intend, and articulating your understanding of that message. I also discussed 3 steps each of us can take to become a more effective listener:

1. Make sure the conversation takes place at a time and place where you feel comfortable talking. If you are in a rush, defer the conversation until later. This will minimize external noise.
2. Focus on the speaker by making a conscious effort to listen. Actually say to yourself, "For the next five minutes, I am only going to listen".
3. Use active listening on a regular basis. Active listening consists of the listener's attempt to give back (or *reflect*) what has been stated by the speaker. If you are going to effectively reflect the feelings and content of the speaker's message, then you really have to pay attention.

In this issue, I describe 3 additional steps each of us can take to increase our listening effectiveness.

4. Utilize good nonverbal behavior to demonstrate to the speaker that you are focused on his or her message. You can effectively manage your nonverbal behavior with the **S.O.L.E.R. Technique**. This stands for *Square*, *Open*, *Lean*, *Eye Contact*, and *Relaxed*. Square refers to facing your communication partner directly, with your shoulders parallel to each other. This allows you to observe nonverbal behavior more effectively. While doing this, you should maintain an open posture (e.g., don't fold your arms across your chest), and keep the space between you and your partner open as well (e.g., avoid talking across desks or tables). While seated, it helps to lean slightly forward. This demonstrates to the other per-

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son that you are genuinely interested in what he or she has to say. It also helps you focus on the speaker's message more effectively. You can also maintain eye contact, although it is important to note that there is a strong cultural element in eye contact. For example, in some cultures, direct eye contact is taboo, especially between two people of unequal status (e.g., a manager and an employee). In this situation, direct eye contact from the person of lower status can be seen as disrespectful. Finally, it is important to try to maintain a relaxed state during all of your interactions. This is particularly important during cross-cultural exchanges because they often increase our anxiety level.

5. Pay attention to nonverbal clues from the speaker such as body posture, facial expression and gestures (e.g., hand movements). This is significant because much of the content from the speaker's message may derive from unspoken communication.

6. Have patience and be willing to let the speaker take some time to get his or her message across. Once again, this becomes especially

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important during multicultural communication. For example, if you are interacting with someone for whom English is the second language, it is important to listen patiently and give the person a chance to get his or her message across without any interruptions. Because the person is not speaking in his or her native tongue, additional time may be needed to effectively communicate the message. It's during times like these that you really need to be patient.

TIPS Booklets

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- **50 Ways to Reduce Bias and Create a Climate for Diversity.**
- **50 Tips for Improving Communication in Culturally Diverse Settings.**
- **50 Tips for Managing and Resolving Conflict.**
- **50 Ways to Lose Weight Without Dieting.**

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About the Author

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