

THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING

A Practical Guide to Effective Listening

Diane Bone



Improve Personal Productivity Through Better Listening

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Listening

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A FIFTY-MINUTE™ SERIES BOOK



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING is not like most books. It stands out from other self-help books in an important way. It's not a book to read—it's a book to *use*. The unique "self-paced" format of this book and the many worksheets, encourage the reader to get involved and, try some new ideas immediately.

Using the simple yet sound techniques presented can make a dramatic change in one's ability to listen effectively.

THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING (and other books listed at the back of this book) can be used effectively in a number of ways. Here are some possibilities.

—**Individual Study.** Because the book is self-instructional, all that is needed is a quiet place, some time and a pencil. By completing the activities and exercises, a reader should not only receive valuable feedback, but also practical steps for self-improvement.

—**Workshops and Seminars.** The book is ideal for assigned reading prior to a workshop or seminar. With the basics in hand, the quality of the participation will improve, and more time can be spent on concept extensions and applications during the program. The book is also effective when it is distributed at the beginning of a session, and participants "work through" the contents.

—**Remote Location Training.** Books can be sent to those not able to attend "home office" training sessions.

There are several other possibilities that depend on the objectives, program or ideas of the user.

One thing for sure, even after it has been read, this book will be looked at—and thought about—again and again.

PREFACE

If you want to improve your ability to listen effectively in your business and personal life, this book is for you. Most of us are not good listeners. While at work, we normally listen at about 25% of our listening capacity. Most of us *think* we are good listeners, and that overconfidence may be the reason for our downfall. Even if we devote full concentration to listening we cannot listen at 100% efficiency for very long. And at 100% efficiency, the message we are listening to must be important enough to sustain our attention.

Humans listen more than anything else, except breathe. Carefully reading this book will help you learn to listen better, on the job and at home. Before good listening can happen you must want to be a good listener. Whether you are a secretary, an account executive, a programmer or a project manager, you can improve your listening if you have the desire, the interest, a high level of concentration, self-discipline and a positive attitude.

This book will provide you with important listening know-how. It is a self-study introduction to the basic skills you need to become a better listener. It will provide many helpful suggestions for incorporating more effective listening skills into your business day. Listening styles and motivation are highly individual, so there is no claim as to how much your listening skills will improve. We offer many suggestions for improvement, along with some motivation to help you make constructive changes in your listening style. After completing *THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING*, you can practice your new-found listening awareness on business associates, family and friends.

Each section in this book provides insightful information, useful tips and practical guidelines for upgrading your skills. These are the *why*, *what*, and *how* of listening. Each section contains activities called "Listening Labs" as well as case studies and check lists. They provide "hands on" reinforcements and illustrations for the key principles of the book.

Section I provides answers to the important question, "Why should I become a better listener?"

Section II describes how good listeners process information and reach higher levels of listening expertise.

Section III individual listening styles are identified as barriers or bridges to communication.

Section IV contains pencil exercises to help you define your listening strengths and weaknesses.

Section V provides ten tips to reinforce your listening strengths, control your weaknesses, and reach new levels of listening effectiveness.

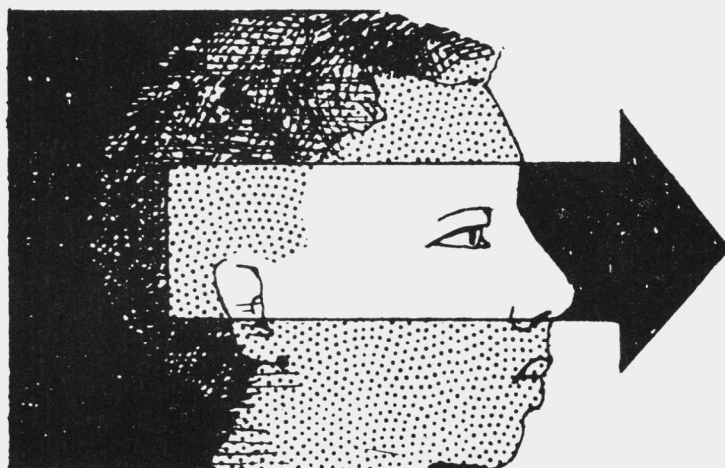
Plan to find three ideas from this book to begin practicing immediately. Use *The Business of Listening* as a reference and challenge yourself to practice until you have mastered each new skill. Remember: practice, properly done, does not make perfect, it makes permanent. Listening well will help you function more effectively in both your business *and* personal life. So pick up your pencil, tune up your ears, and turn to Section I.

Happy Listening!



Diane Bone

SOME IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES FOR THE READER



Objectives give us a sense of direction; a definition of what we plan to accomplish; and a sense of fulfillment when they are achieved. Check the objectives that are important to you. This book will help you achieve them.

By completing this book, I plan to:

- Learn the basics of effective listening skills.
- Learn to recognize good listening behaviors and incorporate them into my daily activities.
- Understand the impact of good listening skills on productivity.
- Learn to correct problems caused by poor listening habits and systematically change them into permanent good habits.

THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING

In Business...

To listen effectively is to reach a 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

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SECTION I: WHY SHOULD YOU (OR ANYONE) LISTEN?

What's In It For Me?

At least half of all communication time is spent listening. Experts in a dozen studies have verified that we listen more than any other activity, except breathing. Listening is the "receiving" part of communication. Listening is:

- 1) Receiving information through your ears (and eyes)
- 2) Giving meaning to that information
- 3) Deciding what you think (or feel) about that information
- 4) Responding to what you hear.

Much of our listening is work related. We spend countless hours of our working life involved in listening related activities. Following is a partial list of work-related activities which involve listening. Check those which apply to you.

- attending meetings, briefings and lectures
- personal counseling (one-on-one)
- giving instructions
- receiving instructions
- interviewing others
- making decisions based on verbal information
- selling or marketing a product or service
- managing others
- helping clients
- servicing other groups or departments
- using the telephone

WHY SHOULD YOU (OR ANYONE) LISTEN? (Continued)

If you are like most people, you checked most of the activities on the previous page. What other work-related activities can you think of that involve listening?

What is the business of listening? More important, what's in it for you? Check those items with which you agree:

Listening effectively can:

- Increase your income.
- Improve your company's profits.
- Make you more promotable.
- Increase your job satisfaction.
- Improve your ability to solve problems.
- Keep you aware of what is going on in your organization.



THE BENEFITS OF LISTENING—A QUIZ

Read each of the following statements. Determine which are true and which are false about the benefits that good listening can bring about in business relationships. Check your answers with those of the author at the bottom of the page.

True or false

- ___ 1. Skill in listening improves your self confidence.
- ___ 2. People like you when you listen to them.
- ___ 3. Good listeners are usually more efficient in completing their work.
- ___ 4. What you create with good listening is flexibility in settling disagreements.
- ___ 5. Intelligent responses are easier when you listen.
- ___ 6. More decisions are made by "shooting from the hip" than by listening to the opinions of others.
- ___ 7. Learning to listen to clients helps you respond more quickly to their needs.
- ___ 8. Few good listeners are promoted to top management positions.
- ___ 9. Good listeners are not often embarrassed by unnecessary mistakes.
- ___ 10. Handling distractions is difficult for good listeners.

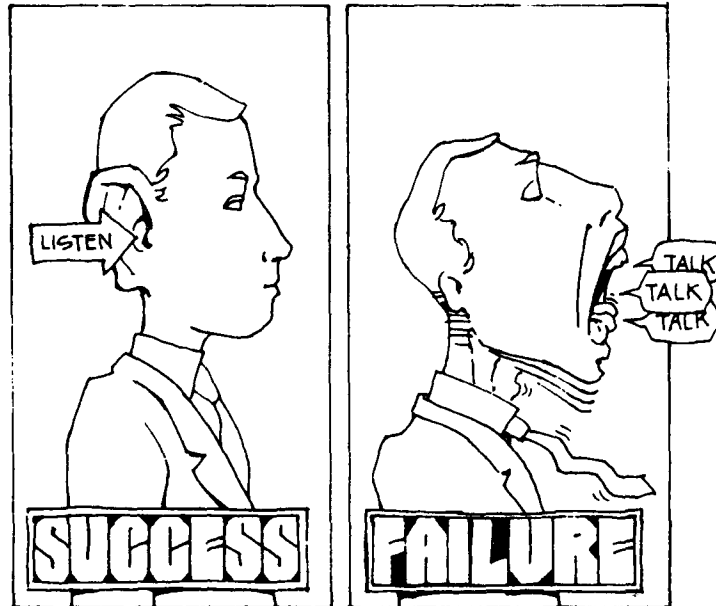
ANSWERS: 1.T 2.T 3.T 4.T 5.T 6.F (Committees, meetings and informal networks are strong evidence that most decisions are made by groups.) 7.T 8.F (Most surveys rank listening as one of the three most important skills of top managers.) 9.T 10.F (Good listeners know how to control distractions by eliminating or ignoring them.)

WHY SHOULD YOU (OR ANYONE) LISTEN? (Continued)

Organizations rely heavily upon listening as an important productivity tool. They need people who have good listening communication skills. Those who know how to listen can:

- * Better understand problems
- * Sustain attention
- * Retain information
- * Improve working relationships

BUSINESS THRIVES WHEN EMPLOYEES LISTEN



WHY SHOULD YOU (OR ANYONE) LISTEN? (Continued)

Asleep at the Switch: The Costs of Lazy Listening

Most of us are not good listeners. We listen at about 25% of our potential, which means we *ignore, forget, distort* or *misunderstand* 75% of what we hear. Hard to believe perhaps, but true. Such lazy listening habits can be very costly—both to our business and to ourselves.

Paul Leet of the Sperry Corporation recently stated: "Poor listening is one of the most significant problems facing business today. Business relies on clear communication. When communication breaks down, costly mistakes are made. Organizations pay for mistakes caused by poor listening with lower profits, and consumers pay for the same mistakes with higher prices."

Lazy listening is a hidden cost of doing business. Suppose you were employed by a large international company with 10,000 employees. If each person in the company made one \$100 error each year because of poor listening, the company would lose a million dollars. This loss would be especially bad news if your company had a profit sharing plan or was forced to lay off workers due to poor earnings.

The following examples are true stories of the costs of lazy listening.

- 1 A sales manager for a large company asked his accounting department how he could charge off a \$100,000 error caused by a dispatcher who routed a fleet of drivers to deliver building material to the wrong state. The dispatcher heard the city (Portland) but not the state (Maine). The result was eight trucks 3,000 miles off course in Portland, Oregon. How could this problem have been avoided?

WHY SHOULD YOU (OR ANYONE) LISTEN? (Continued)

2 Three computer sales representatives from different companies presented their products to a historian who had special application needs. The historian was a dealer in rare manuscripts and explained to each sales representative what computer functions were required. Two of the sales representatives did not listen and presented products that were inappropriate. The third understood what the historian wanted and she got the order. The manuscript dealer was impressed with only one thing, and it wasn't the hardware because he didn't know much about computers. He did know that two people didn't listen and the third did. He bought his computer from the person who listened. What was the cost to the other two companies?

3 Linda recently cut short a business trip to attend an important investment dinner meeting with her husband. She hurried from the airport, dressed for dinner and met her husband at the restaurant. An hour and a half later their financial advisor had not arrived. A phone call deduced they were at the right restaurant, but on the wrong night. The dinner was rescheduled, but Linda sacrificed profitable business she would have closed had she kept her original trip schedule. How can Linda avoid this problem in the future?

WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN?

Why should we listen? What are the advantages of overcoming lazy listening habits and changing unproductive ways of listening? List as many reasons as you can think of in the space below. Place a next to those that are most important to you. Then turn the page and read "Fifty Reasons to Become a Better Listener." Check any you would like to add to your list.

REASONS FOR ME TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

FIFTY PERFECTLY GOOD REASONS TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER

1. To learn something.
2. To be entertained.
3. To understand a situation.
4. To get information.
5. To be courteous.
6. To be responsible.
7. To prevent accidents.
8. To be a team player.
9. To ask intelligent questions.
10. To improve confidence.
11. To protect freedom.
12. To find out people's needs.
13. To reach a productivity or sales quota.
14. To be valued and trusted.
15. To use money more wisely.
16. To be more efficient.
17. To make accurate evaluations.
18. To make comparisons.
19. To understand and be understood.
20. To analyze the speaker's purpose.
21. To develop a reputation of being a good listener.
22. To get the best value.
23. To improve discipline.
24. To enhance relationships.