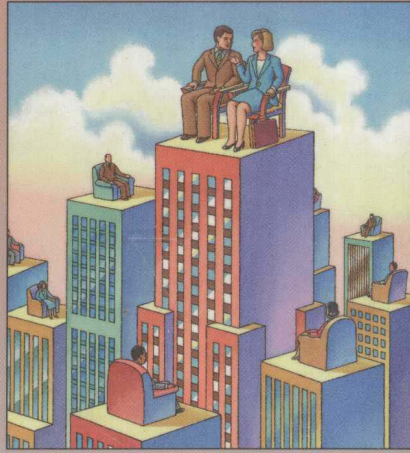


BUSINESS

Skills

EXPRESS SERIES



EFFECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Dennis M. KRATZ
Abby Robinson KRATZ

Effective Listening Skills

DENNIS M. KRATZ, Ph.D.
ABBY ROBINSON KRATZ, Ed.M.
in cooperation with Art James Productions, Inc.

Business Skills Express Series



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PREFACE

The fact that you have picked up this book indicates that you already have given some thought to improving your skills as a listener. Now you may be wondering what to expect from the book. Will reading it make you a more effective listener? What are the basic principles behind the book?

Imagine the following situation:

Jack and Bridget Reilly are about to leave on a vacation. The bags are packed. The car is filled with gas.

They pull onto the highway. Jack turns to his wife and asks her to look at the road map and figure out the best route to their destination.

“There’s only one problem,” she replies. “You haven’t told me where we are going.”

“Oh,” he says, “I don’t have any place picked out. But I do want to get there as quickly as possible.” ■

Sound absurd? Of course it does. How can we decide the best way to get someplace if we don’t know where we are going?

Listening is often like driving. This book might even be described as a kind of driver’s instruction book for listeners. We present some basic, general principles and a number of specific examples, but the rest is up to you. You can’t improve your driving without practice, and you can’t

improve your listening merely by reading a book. You will have to perform the prescribed exercises in the book and practice them in your everyday conversations.

Think of your current listening skills in the same way as your driving skills. First, is your vehicle well maintained? Or have you neglected it? Have you checked directions or maps, weather reports, and traffic reports? Are there any driving problems that have caused you trouble in the past? You may drive differently, and take different routes, depending on the situation and the reasons for your traveling.

Just as your driving depends on the situation, listening to a friend talk about a vacation and listening to a sales pitch also require different approaches. Different listening situations call for different skills and approaches.

We have written this book with one main objective: to help you become a more effective listener. By *effective* we mean able to recognize different listening situations and apply appropriate skills to each situation.

The Golden Rule of Listening

All the principles and all the exercises presented in this book can be expressed in one basic rule of effective listening. The Golden Rule of listening is simple and clear:

Listen to others as you would like others to listen to you.

Keep this rule in mind throughout the book. When you are trying to explain something, what kind of listener do you want? When you are trying to sell an idea (or a product), how would you like the other person to listen? When you are upset or have good news to share, what kind of listener do you want?

This book will help you do more than imagine the kind of listening you would like to receive when you are talking. It will help you become that kind of listener to others.

Dennis Kratz
Abby Kratz

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About Art James Productions, Inc.

Close to 200 of America's most successful companies have employed Art James Productions' educational programs to entertain and inform their personnel. These programs range from TV-style game shows to computer-based interactive multimedia learning—all devoted to strengthening professional and interpersonal skills, including listening, one of the most essential elements in any human transaction. For more information about Art James Productions, Inc., contact:

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About the Business Skills Express Series

This expanding series of authoritative, concise, and fast-paced books delivers high-quality training on key business topics at a remarkably affordable cost. The series will help managers, supervisors, and frontline personnel in organizations of all sizes and types hone their business skills while enhancing job performance and career satisfaction.

Business Skills Express books are ideal for employee seminars, independent self-study, on-the-job training, and classroom-based instruction. Express books are also convenient-to-use references at work.

Self-Assessment

Effective listening skills are crucial to successful communication in the workplace, with family and friends, and in every situation where messages are sent and received. Use the self-assessment below to measure your current level of listening expertise. The chapters in *Effective Listening Skills* will help you build on your current skills and hone new ones. Good luck!

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. In a conversation, I am able to interpret and evaluate others' comments, going beyond the surface meaning of words.	_____	_____	_____
2. I am able to adapt my listening skills to fit different requirements of a listening situation.	_____	_____	_____
3. I can differentiate between the five functions of communication and listen and respond accordingly.	_____	_____	_____
4. I use feedback effectively to elicit honest and direct communication from others.	_____	_____	_____
5. I screen out noise and outside distractions to concentrate on speakers' messages.	_____	_____	_____
6. I recognize and eliminate inner distractions to better focus on speakers.	_____	_____	_____
7. I listen for content rather than style.	_____	_____	_____
8. I adopt and practice a ready-to-learn attitude when listening to others.	_____	_____	_____
9. I practice a concise and reliable system of note-taking.	_____	_____	_____
10. I am a critical listener, able to discern assertions from facts.	_____	_____	_____
11. I listen empathically, enabling others to express their emotions in a nonthreatening atmosphere.	_____	_____	_____
12. I enable people to move from feelings to positive action by helping them set and meet goals.	_____	_____	_____

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1

The Basics of Listening

This chapter will help you to:

- Define listening.
- Relate listening to the process of communication.
- Understand the four stages of the listening process.
- Identify five types of listening.

Anna Rivera was already running late that morning when she heard on the radio that it was supposed to rain heavily. Anna decided to leave for work as early as possible since traffic conditions would be terrible. But at breakfast her daughter's tone of voice indicated that Jennie was upset, and Anna wanted to talk with her until Jennie felt better.

Driving to work, Anna listened to the news but was concerned by a knocking sound in her car's engine. "Time for a tune-up," she thought.

As she walked into her office, the phone was ringing. It was her supervisor, calling a staff meeting for eleven o'clock. Before the meeting, Anna interviewed an applicant for the new job in merchandising and also talked with a representative who tried to persuade her to switch long-distance telephone plans.

She was on her way to the staff meeting when Bill Roberts, one of her assistants, stopped to ask her advice. Because she was late for the meeting, Anna asked Bill to come by her office that afternoon.

At the staff meeting an outside consultant gave a presentation on the importance of effective listening in management. Anna did not have to be convinced. ■

WHAT IS LISTENING?

Listening is the act by which we *make sense of sounds*. The most common form of listening involves *spoken messages*. Anna Rivera listened to individuals in a wide range of situations—in person, on the telephone, and on the radio.

However, the act of listening is not limited to language or even to people. We make sense out of other sounds as well. A doctor, for example, can learn about the state of a patient's health by listening to that person's breathing or heartbeat. A skilled mechanic can identify a problem by listening to a running engine.

Time Out

1. What sounds did Anna Rivera listen to that did not involve spoken messages?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. When did Anna make an interpretation based on something more than the words she heard?

3. When did Anna participate in each of the following types of listening situations?

a. Listening to someone primarily for information.

b. Listening to someone with a problem.

c. Listening to someone trying to persuade her to take a specific course of action.

Check Your Answers

1. a. The noise in her engine.
b. The ringing telephone.
2. Her daughter's tone of voice.
3. a. The news on the radio; listening to her supervisor.
b. Her daughter; Bill Roberts.
c. The job applicant; the sales representative.

WHY IS LISTENING IMPORTANT?

Studies reveal that most people spend as much as 90 percent of their working days in one of the four modes of communication: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Of these four modes, however, we devote *more than half* our time to listening. We spend about 30 percent of our time listening to mass communication media (radio, television) and 25 percent listening to other people (either in person or on the telephone). Moreover, research shows that individuals in managerial positions spend even more time listening—as much as 70 percent of the typical day. The higher the position, the more time is spent listening to others. It is not surprising then that effective listening is regarded as one of the most important skills for a manager to possess.

Think about It

The fact that you are reading this book indicates that you already recognize the importance of listening and perhaps are concerned with the quality of your listening skills. On the lines below list five work-related activities that involve listening. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being "poor" and 5 "outstanding") as a listener in each situation. If your grade is less than perfect, briefly describe why you are dissatisfied with your performance.

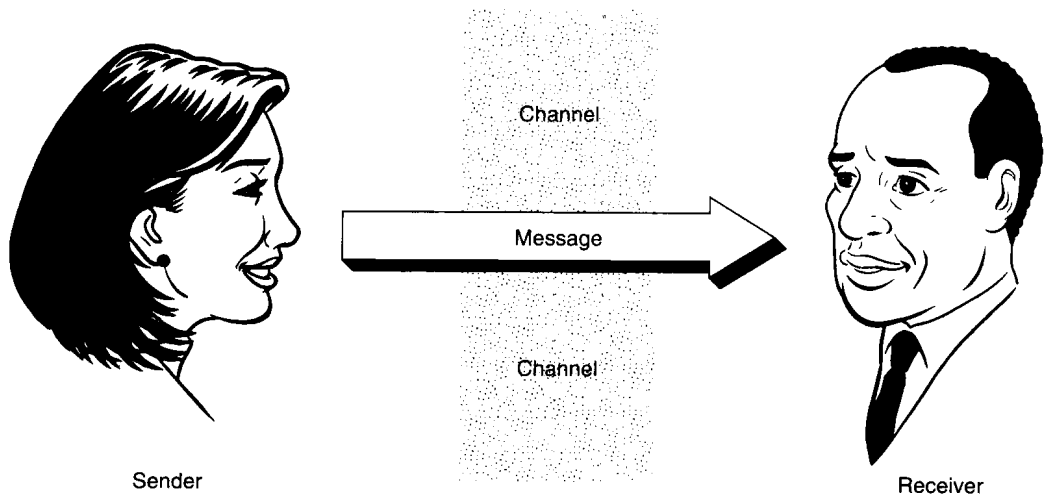
	SITUATION	GRADE	COMMENTS
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____

Although many people take listening for granted, it is a complex skill that can be improved with training. Let your list of dissatisfactions serve as a starting point to improve yourself as a listener. The first step in this program of improvement is to understand the nature of listening as a part of the larger process of communication.

BUILDING A COMMUNICATION MODEL

Communication is the process by which one person sends a message to another. This process has four primary elements:

1. The sender
2. The message
3. The channel of communication
4. The receiver



A Communication Model.

The Sender

The process begins when an individual, called the *sender*, has something to communicate. The sender may want to impart some information to another person or encourage that person to do something.

The Message

Let's go back to Anna Rivera in her office. Suppose Anna wants her secretary to locate a file concerning an important account. Since Anna cannot expect her secretary to read her mind, she must translate her wish into a message that her secretary will understand. This act of translating is often called *encoding*. Anna has become the sender and "Bring me the Perkins file" has become the message.

The Channel of Communication

Note that senders have numerous choices when it comes to encoding, that is, translating wishes into messages. They can use words, for example.

If they decide to use words, they can either speak or write a note. Or they can depend on a gesture to communicate meaning. The chosen medium is called the *channel of communication*.

Spoken language is a channel of communication. *How* people say those words, however, can be as important as the words themselves.

All speakers use vocal signals that affect the meaning of words. How loudly they speak, what words are stressed, the tempo of speech—all these elements that we call the speaker's tone of voice—determine the message.

The Receiver

When the message reaches the receiver, in this case Anna's secretary, the basic process we just described occurs in reverse. The receiver must try to understand from the message what the sender was trying to express. The receiver's role in the process is to *decode* the message.

The role of the receiver in this process has four phases:

1. *Sense*: The receiver becomes aware of the message.
2. *Interpret*: The receiver tries to understand the meaning and purpose of the message.
3. *Evaluate*: The receiver decides whether the message is important (worth responding to or acting on).
4. *Respond*: The receiver responds to the message by acting or by sending another message.

In this simple example, Anna's secretary receives the message, understands that Anna wants the Perkins file, and acts on this interpretation by bringing the file to her. The communication has been successful.