

Skills 360 – Improving your Communication Skills (Part 1): Listening

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think you have good listening skills?
2. When you don't understand what someone says, what do you usually do?
3. Do you often take notes when listening?

Vocabulary

Countless: very many; "The dot-com bubble saw the birth of countless small Internet companies."

Foundation: the base or support for something; "All applicants are expected to have a solid foundation in systems programming and algorithm design."

For starters: we can say "for starters" to introduce the first point in a series; "I think our problems stem from several mistakes; for starters, we should have diversified our product line earlier."

To catch: to hear something correctly; "I'm sorry but I didn't catch that last point. Could you repeat it?"

To get over something: to stop worrying or being upset about something; "I know it wasn't fair that they laid you off Dave, but you need to get over it and find another job."

To translate: to change words into another language; "With an increasingly international subscriber list, we've translated our site into over a dozen other languages."

To get your head back into something: to refocus your attention after thinking about something else; "In an open office plan, workers often have difficulty getting their heads back into work after continual interruptions."

To grab onto: to get and hold onto something; "The media really grabbed onto the fact that executives at the big financial services firms were being rewarded with huge bonuses."

To fill in: to add information or words to make something complete; "Before my trip to India, my assistant filled in some of the gaps in my knowledge of the country and its culture."

Logical guess: if you make a "logical guess", you decide what you think is probably true based on the information you have; "We feel fairly confident in making the logical guess that the property bubble will burst within the next two years."

To shoot for: to try to get or achieve; "Before you head into an interview, you should have some idea of the salary you're shooting for."

Gist: the main idea or general sense; "Although I'm not fluent in Spanish, I can catch the gist of TV news programs."

Underlying point: the idea that someone is trying to explain with details and examples or the basic purpose of something; "The underlying point of the new regulation is to discourage investors from taking on too much risk."

Not the end of the world: when we say it is "not the end of the world", we are saying that a problem or difficulty is not too serious or bad; "A: I don't think I explained my last idea very well during the presentation. B: Ah, it's not the end of the world Judy. Overall you did a great job."

Central: main or most important; "In many African countries, the government plays a central role in economic development."

Clue: a hint or information that helps us figure something out; "New ways of measuring consumer confidence can provide clues to economic fluctuations."

To focus on: to pay most attention to or give most time and resources to; "All right everyone, I really think we need to focus on cost-cutting here."

Patient: if someone is "patient", they have the ability to wait or not become upset in a difficult situation; "My financial advisor has told me to be patient because the stock market should rebound soon."

To get hung up on: to think too much about something, especially something bad or difficult; "If we get too hung up on the planning process, we'll never actually decide anything."

"Say": we can use the word "say" to introduce an imaginary or hypothetical situation; "Say you were CEO for a day. What's the first thing you would do?"

Particularly disconcerting: if something is "disconcerting", it makes people worried or nervous, it's often collocated with 'particularly' to mean very worrisome; "The second quarterly drop in revenue is particularly disconcerting to shareholders, who were already nervous about the company's direction."

Whopping: we can use "a whopping" before a number of figure to emphasize how large it is; "In 2007, Disney bought Club Penguin for a whopping \$700 million."

To wrack your brain: to try very hard to think of or remember something; "I know I've met her before but I'm wracking my brain trying to remember where from and what her name is."

To figure out: to find a solution or be able to understand something; "If we want to make big money here, we're going to need to figure out how to scale this business up."

To provoke questions: to make someone wonder or have questions about something; "The CEO's speech to the board provoked more questions than it provided answers."

To follow up on something: to learn or do more about something; "Hello Mr. Grant? I'm just calling to follow up on your request for technical assistance."

To put something aside: to not worry about something or to decide to deal with it later; "I think we need to put the staffing problems aside for now and discuss our general financial situation first."

To come up: if something "comes up", it appears or happens, sometimes surprisingly; "A good risk management plan can prepare you for problems that come up in the course of business."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how you can improve your communication skills.

We spend a lot of time looking at different ways that you can make *other* people understand your ideas. But what about *your* ability to make sure you understand what other people are saying? Some people say that there's a good reason we have *two* ears but *one* mouth: because we should spend twice as much time *listening* as we do speaking. And **countless** business leaders have emphasized the importance of good listening skills as the **foundation** of good communication.

Okay, but listening and understanding are not always easy. We've all found ourselves in situations – it could be a meeting, a presentation, an interview, or a negotiation – where we think “what did he just say?” or “what was that word?” Well, **for starters**, we need to accept that we might not understand everything. That's not necessarily a problem. But what you do when you *don't* understand something is what separates a good listener from a bad listener.

You see, it wouldn't always be a good idea to stop a speaker and say “what was that word you just used?” Or “can you repeat that sentence?” If you didn't **catch** something, well, **get over it**. And fast. You don't have time to stop listening and think about what something means. And you don't have time to **translate** either. You'll get lost, and it will be difficult to **get your head back into** what you're supposed to be listening to. Instead, you need to **grab onto** what you *do* understand, and then **fill in** what you don't with **logical guesses**.

What you should be **shooting for**, first and foremost, is the ***gist*** of what's being said. That means the main idea or **underlying point** that the speaker is trying to make. Details will support that main idea, and if you don't catch them all it's **not the end of the world**.

Okay, but how do we catch the gist? Well, one way is to focus on key words. Key words are the words that we understand that show the **central** message. They provide direct **clues** to the main idea. So if you hear someone say “blah blah new plan blah blah terrible idea blah blah blah can't support blah blah blah”, then you have a good idea what the person is saying without understanding all the “blah blah.” If you **focus on** the “blah blah,” however, you might miss those important words that you *do* understand.

Another thing to remember is that people often repeat or explain their ideas further. If you don't understand an idea right away, just be **patient**. The speaker might explain what she means, or give an example, or repeat the idea in different words. But if you get **hung up on** not understanding the first statement, you risk confusion. Here's an example: **say** you're listening to someone give a presentation on the latest sales figures, and he says “The last quarter was **particularly disconcerting**.”

Now, do you know what “particularly disconcerting” means? If not, don't worry too much. Because the speaker will probably go on to explain or give examples. He might say something like this: “Our electronics division was down 13%. Mobile was down 16%. And automotive was down a **whopping** 24%.” Now, you can probably

guess that “particularly disconcerting” is negative, right? But if you stopped listening and started **wracking your brain** to **figure out** what it meant, then you might have missed the explanation.

Of course, sometimes there are things that you hear that **provoke questions** that you need answered. That does certainly happen. And in those situations, the best thing to do is to write them down. You can make a note of a couple of important words, or write down an entire question. Then you can **follow up on** the matter later. And because you’ve written it down for later, you can **put it aside** at the time and keep listening.

So let’s do a quick review of what we covered here and see how well you were listening. Remember to accept that you might not be able to understand *everything*. Don’t stop listening when something you don’t know **comes up**, just keep trying to get the gist and the key words. And be patient because sometimes explanation or repetition can clear things up for us. And finally, make notes if you have to. Now, will these strategies guarantee that you understand everything perfectly? Of course not. Sometimes we need to ask for clarification, and if you tune in next time you’ll hear some tips for doing just that.

That’s all for today. If you’d like to test yourself on what we’ve just covered, have a look at the **myBOnline.com** website. There you’ll find a quiz about today’s show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. Why does Tim say that countless business leaders have emphasized?
 - A The importance of clear communication in business.
 - B The importance of listening skills in communication.
 - C The importance of language development in training.
 - D The importance of clear language in presentations.

2. According to Tim, what we do when we *don't* understand something is what separates _____ from _____.

3. What does Tim suggest doing when you don't understand something that someone says?
 - A Stop listening for a moment to think.
 - B Ask for clarification.
 - C Translate in your head.
 - D Let it go and just keep listening.

4. What does Tim say that speakers often do that can help us when we don't understand?
 - A Use visual materials.
 - B Explain their ideas or give examples.
 - C Provide an opportunity for questions.
 - D Simplify their language.

5. According to Tim, when you have questions it is a good idea to...
 - A Write them down.
 - B Ask someone besides the speaker.
 - C Politely interrupt the speaker.
 - D Phrase them correctly.

6. Which of the following does Tim NOT recommend in his talk?
 - A Being patient.
 - B Focusing on key words.
 - C Avoiding logical guesses.
 - D Trying to catch the gist.

Review Answers

1. Why does Tim say that countless business leaders have emphasized?

B The importance of listening skills in communication

2. According to Tim, what we do when we *don't* understand something is what separates **good listeners** from **bad listeners**.

3. What does Tim suggest doing when you don't understand something that someone says?

D Let it go and just keep listening

4. What does Tim say that speakers often do that can help us when we don't understand?

B Explain their ideas or give examples

5. According to Tim, when you have questions it is a good idea to...

A Write them down

6. Which of the following does Tim NOT recommend in his talk?

C Avoiding logical guesses

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