



Misconceptions about Listening

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You have two ears and one mouth. Therefore, you should listen twice as much as you speak! When you were a child, did anyone ever tell you that? Think about it. If two people sat down for a discussion and followed that principle, there would be total silence! Of course, some people need to practice keeping their mouths shut, but some need to practice speaking out.

It is generally understood that being a good listener requires **MORE** of the listener than remaining quiet, and appearing to be *tuned in* to the speaker.

Communicators just aren't sure what that **more** consists of. This is why listening may be the most misunderstood aspect of communication. Many of you are familiar with **active** listening, where listening is accompanied by questions that elicit feedback and increase clarity.

In addition to listening actively, you must create space within to receive what is taken in by the ears. In the midst of your assumptions and perceptions, this space will allow you to entertain and even contain another's ideas, thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Doing this requires you to stretch your inner boundaries, to remain open to the facets of any message with which you disagree. In fact, the more you find yourself in disagreement with another's views, the more space you need to create.

This doesn't mean you give up all of your perceptions and outlook. In fact, by doing this effectively you will find at times you strengthen your viewpoint on an issue. Creating this space simply means you are genuinely and openly receiving, with as little judgment (i.e., *this is good, this is bad*) as possible, the other person's views. Temporarily, but for as long as it takes to be certain you've understood the other's views, you have set your views aside.

When you hear (or think you hear) something with which you disagree, the natural tendency is to think or say, *I don't agree with that!* This immediately blocks listening. The *space* within you fills up with your own thoughts and feelings. The other person's insights bounce off the inner fortress you've created.

When you open up space for different views, you create an opportunity to combine outlooks. By examining issues in a variety of different ways you help build greater understanding of others and the issues with which humanity, communities, workplaces and families wrestle.

Just as the best recipes have numerous ingredients and spices, knowledge and wisdom grow from allowing bits and pieces of the perceptions of others to combine within each of our individual domains. Therefore, instead of the **two ears, one mouth** maxim, I think **two heads are better than one** better serves us all.

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