

## Can You Hear Me Now? Tuning In, So They Don't Turn Out

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Are you being heard when you speak? Not just through cell phone static, but in face-to-face meetings? When talking to some people, do you feel like yelling: **Pay attention! Listen up!** Their eyes wander, they have a blank stare on their face. Or, if you're really not getting your message across, you see their eyelids getting heavy.

To connect with others, a speaker must get on the same **frequency** as the listener. If there's a bad connection, you might as well say nothing. While talking, you must constantly measure the impact you're having. This is one of many ways skilled one-to-one communication requires the same skills as making effective presentations before groups.

Have you ever been to a party and noticed someone talking **AT** another person? The speaker's train of thought apparently has no caboose. You can tell that the listener wants to escape, but the speaker is oblivious to the cues.

At a holiday open house, many years ago, I saw an outgoing young woman talking fast and energetically to another woman. As she talked, the young woman never noticed the expression on the listener's face, or the fact that the woman was trying to escort her two little girls out of the room. The young woman eventually blurted out—*These children can't possibly be yours—they must be your grandchildren!* Oops! Bad assumption.

In the workplace, the ability to connect is the ability to get the job done. Whether it's a spur-of-the-moment encounter or a planned meeting, getting your message across is a key to your success.

How can you better ensure that the person to whom you're speaking is listening to you? **Here are 20 tips for both planned and impromptu meetings.**

### **Before a face-to-face meeting:**

1. Set the most effective time and place (see the article titled "Situation Management")
2. Organize what you'll say. You want to communicate clearly and avoid overloading the listener
3. Plan plenty of time. Remember that introverts, take an average of 8 seconds more than extroverts to process what they've heard before responding.
4. Create supporting documents for detailed information
5. Prepare for potential disagreements or confrontations by anticipating what the other party might say.

### **Early in the meeting:**

6. Sell them on listening to you. Ask ***Is this a good time?*** If they later seem to tune out, you can say: ***Are you certain this is a good time? We can set up a time to talk later.***
7. Appeal to their interests: ***I thought you would like to hear more about this because you...***
8. Stress the importance of what you will say: ***I want to be sure I make this clear, because when we finish this project we can.....***

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10. Mirror the listener's communication style as much as possible. For example, if they tend to bottom-line what they say, get to your point quickly.

**During the meeting:**

11. Use the listener's body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures as the **crystal ball** in which you can see what they are thinking, tell if they're becoming distracted, and know how your message is being received.

12. Use open-ended questions to involve the listener and ask for their input: **What do you think about this? I'm thinking... what do you think...?**

13. Occasionally, do something different to re-capture their attention. Lower your voice, slow down, tell a related story or show a visual aid. When you lower your voice and slow down, listeners pay closer attention to what you're saying.

14. Deal swiftly and gently with interruptions. **Excuse me, I want to hear what you have to say, but please let me finish this point before we move on.**

15. If differences of opinion arise, return to a point of agreement. Expand on this to proceed. **It looks like we both agree that.....** Guide the meeting through this detour, then bring it back on track.

**Don'ts:**

16. Don't assume silence means understanding. Silence often means confusion and fear of asking dumb questions.

17. Don't move the discussion forward until the other person indicates readiness.

18. Don't misread cues. For example, many women nod, simply to indicate they're listening. Their nods do not mean understanding or agreement.

19. Don't speak too quickly. What's familiar to you, may be difficult for someone else to grasp.

20. Don't ask: **Do you understand?** This will get you a **yes** or **no** answer at best. At worst it sounds patronizing. Instead, ask about specifics and do a process check: **Tell me what you think about this so far.** Or, **I may not be making all of this clear. What parts of this are confusing to you?**

Holding the attention of a listener requires that the speaker pay continuous attention to how what they're saying is being received. Tune in, so they don't tune out.

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