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Bite Your Tongue! 10 Ways to Be an Effective Listener

By Joy Fisher-Sykes

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Have you ever spoken to someone and then felt the need to say, "Did you hear what I just said?" Why did you feel the need to ask? Probably because the listener didn't provide you with the feedback you needed to know you were heard.

Listening is the most important, yet often most neglected, communication skill. In fact, the ability to listen is often rated one of the top five abilities employers seek in their staff. It's also certainly highly sought after in the people nearest and dearest to our hearts.

Here are 10 ways to be an effective listener:

1. Recognize the difference between hearing and listening
 - * There is a very distinct difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is to merely perceive sound.
 - * Listening is the mindful, conscious act and desire to hear, comprehend, and response to others.
2. Be willing to listen
 - * Begin with a commitment to listen – be open minded and consider other points of view.
 - * Listen regardless of whether you agree or disagree with what's said. Resist the urge jump to conclusions; be defensive or argumentative with the speaker.
3. Be attentive
 - * Stop what you're doing and give the speaker your

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undivided attention. If it's not a good time for you, defer the conversation.

- * Ignore the desire to multi-task and selectively listen (only listening to bits and pieces of information).

- * Remain in the moment for the duration of the conversation - don't tune in and out or pretend to be listening when you're really thinking about where to go on your next vacation.

4. Show respect

- * Acknowledge others with your body language – face the speaker, look interested, and make eye contact.

- * Avoid ending the conversation abruptly.

5. Empathize

- * Be sensitive, compassionate, and understanding - realize it may be difficult for the speaker to talk about this matter.

- * Empathy doesn't mean you have to agree with the speaker.

- * Avoid thinking about how to "one up" the speaker with your own tale of woe.

6. Be patient

- * We often interrupt because we are afraid we will forget our point(s). Don't interrupt – allow the speaker to finish what she/he has to say.

- * Don't finish the speaker's sentences because you think they're taking too long to get to the point.

- * Focus on what is being said instead of what you think is going to be said.

7. Eliminate interruptions and distractions

- * When possible, speak in a neutral location to avoid interruptions and distractions.

- * Be aware of and avoid interruptions - phones or pagers (use voice mail), visitors (close the door) and distractions (voice mail light, overflowing in box, incoming mail).

8. Seek Understanding

- * Focus on main points.

- * Paraphrase and seek clarification of points that are unclear or that you don't understand.

9. Show you're actively listening

- * Listen with more than just your ears. Acknowledge and respond to the speaker with facial expressions (smile, nod/shake your head, eye contact) and verbal comments ("I see," "I understand," "okay," "yes") to aid the conversation.

10. Simply Listen

- * Sometimes our idea of listening is to jump in and give unwanted advice. Listening is not an open invitation to

resolve a dilemma. Just listen because often the speaker simply seeks a sympathetic ear.

Whether you are a manager or employee, husband or wife, parent or child, pastor or parishioner, friend or foe, listening is critical to the success of your relationships. Take the time to truly listen to others and discover you'll not only improve your relationships, you will achieve a new level of overall success in your life. Apply these techniques today so you can enjoy a better tomorrow!

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Script Mechanics—Suggestions for Writing Effective Voiceover Copy

By Peter Drew

As with any of the performing arts, an effective voiceover begins with a well–crafted script. You don't have to have many years of writing experience to create copy that is both effective and a pleasure for the voice actor to perform. Here are some ideas to consider before you put your pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

Commercials: Radio and TV

Determine the purpose of the ad, e.g. drive traffic to a store, produce direct response inquiries, announce a grand opening, move end–of–season merchandise, etc.

Determine who your customer is and speak to that person one to one, and, ideally, present one main idea in the copy.

Use A.I.D.A.: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. Get the listener's attention to the ad; get the listener interested in what you're offering; get the listener to want to take some action on your offer; give the listener a means to act and urge that action.

Narrations (also called "Industrials")

For a video script, use the story board, if you have one, to guide the development of the script. This will help you time the voice over to the video's scenes.

For audio only, where no storyboard exists, do a rough outline. This will help you create a basic logical structure before you start writing. The result will be a script that flows much better for the narrator and

the intended listener.

All Scripts

Leave room for "verbal white space." Just as a large block of densely printed copy is intimidating and difficult to read, a voice-over script that's crammed with copy is difficult to follow and understand. A good rule of thumb for 30-second radio or TV copy is eight lines down (double-spaced), 10 words across the page. For a slower, more intimate read, go with seven lines, 10 words across. The same idea applies for a briskly paced 60-second ad: 16 lines down, 10 words across. For a slower pace, 14 lines, 10 words across. This 60-second guideline is helpful in timing long-form scripts, too. Just count the pages and you have the total number of minutes.

Numbers are words, so be sure to consider them in your word count. A phone number, such as 1-860-291-9476, is eleven words. That's more than one entire line of copy! Try spelling out numbers as words to get a good handle on the actual length of your copy. For example:

1-860-291-9476,

when typed or written out, is

one-eight-six-oh, two-nine-one, nine-four-seven-six.

You can see how long the line really is when the numbers are spelled out. Then, after you're ready to print your final draft, convert the words back to numbers.

Write for the ear, not the eye. Construct short, conversational sentences, with natural breaks for taking a breath. This is especially helpful to narrators when they voice technical or medical copy, which contains large, complicated, and difficult-to-pronounce terms.

Read your copy out loud, just as you intend the voice talent to read it, and time it. Then adjust your copy accordingly for timing.

Try to write in the active voice, not passive voice. This is a passive construction: "When writing a script, be sure you're saying some exciting things, or else you'll be losing the attention of the listener." Instead, use the active voice, structured something like this: "When you write a script, say something exciting, or you'll lose the listener's attention." Active voice is more conversational and easier for the ear and mind to follow.

Happy writing!

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Peter Drew, a freelance voice-over talent and copywriter/producer with 28 years of experience, is heard on radio and television stations, corporate presentations, web sites, and messages-on-hold across America. To hear samples of his work or to send an email regarding this article, please visit

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