

Seven Common Roadblocks to Listening

1. Tuning out dull topics

Many listeners decide early on that a topic is simply not interesting. However, it has been said that there are no uninteresting subjects, only uninterested people. Don't be a lazy listener!

Remedy: Listen for something you want or need. You can always find something of value in what another person is saying.

2. Faking attention

It's no sin to be courteous, but sometimes we take manners to an unfortunate extreme. When we find someone's conversation boring, but are too polite (or afraid to risk offending the person), we pretend to pay attention, though our minds are a thousand miles away.

Remedy: Sincerely pay attention. Lean forward, make eye contact, smile, nod your head, and ask questions to show you are listening. Good listening is not relaxed or passive. It takes energy to listen.

3. Yielding to distractions

Outside noises or movements often affect our concentration. A window drops shut, someone sneezes, a book falls to the floor. All too often, we give our attention to the hubbub of activity around us instead of the speaker in front of us.

Remedy: Choose a suitable environment in which to have personal conversations. Learn to ignore the distractions and don't become a distraction yourself!

4. Criticizing delivery or physical appearance

Many people abandon their good listening habits when they become overly critical of the speaker's physical appearance or delivery. Regardless of who the speaker is, the content of his/her message is always far more important than the form of her/his delivery.

Remedy: Be generous enough to overlook the difficulties of a speaker. Pay attention to what is said, not how it is said. Don't use poor appearance or speaking style as an excuse for not listening.

5. Jumping to conclusions

Be patient. We often think that we know what a person is going to say before they have even finished speaking. Occasionally, we are biased toward a speaker, and so we close our minds to the speaker's message before we have heard it in its entirety.

Remedy: Hear the speaker out. Understand their point of view fully before accepting or rejecting it.

6. Interrupting

Do you spend most of your listening time actually listening or do you spend it thinking about what you want to say? Interrupting someone is an almost certain sign that you don't know or care about what the other person is saying.

Remedy: Take time to think about what is being said before responding. Wait for an opening. Put yourself in their shoes.

7. Overreacting to emotional words

We will react from time to time to certain words or phrases that push our "hot buttons." At such times, we might experience a strong emotional reaction that blocks out your ability to listen. We might let our thoughts wander on to other subjects, blocking the speaker's message from our minds, or we might start to lay plans to trap the speaker in some way.

Remedy: Take time to think about what is being said before responding. Wait for an opening. Put yourself in their shoes.