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Communication skills

LISTENING

Listening is a complex process and an integral part of the overall communication process, yet it is ignored due to three reasons. Firstly the two output parts of communication, speaking and writing, are highly visible and are more easily assessed. Secondly, many of us are not willing to improve our listening skills. Much of this unwillingness results from our incomplete understanding of this process. Lastly, listening and reading, the two input parts of communication are invisible. Although we can read aloud to show our ability of reading but cannot listen aloud. Let us define and analyze listening to better understand and practice this key skill.

Definition:

1. Listening is the process of making sense of spoken messages.
2. Listening is the process of receiving, attending and understanding auditory messages. often the steps of responding and remembering are also included.
3. It is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal message.

The Process of Listening like communication in general, listening involves certain basic steps to complete. These steps make a process moving through the following phases.

1. **Hearing or receiving.**
2. **Attending or filtering**
3. **Understanding.**
4. **Responding**
5. **Remembering**

Let us look at each step one by one in the listening process with examples:

Hearing/receiving

Hearing or receiving is the first step in this process. It is the perception of sounds. If there is no sound we will not be able to hear or receive and listen ultimately. Receiving is caused by sound waves striking the ears at a certain frequency and loudness. Hearing or receiving is the physiological dimension of listening.

Example: - Imagine you send me a message by SMS, you may have tried your best in its composition and technique but if I do not turn on my cell phone, will not receive it. The same applies to verbal communication. Receiver or hearer is not simply connected to the senders. The lack of connection may be due to day dreaming or sound weakness.

Filtering/Attending

The second step in the listening process is the psychological dimension. It is the decision to filter the heard sounds by paying your attention to such sounds. We pick and choose what we want to attend and not every sound which/that reach our ears so it becomes filtering like process. Mostly we attend to those sounds we think we would get something out of them or find of our interest. Attending someone's message physically and psychologically encourage the speaker to stay focused on his message.

Example:-The Email analogy is used again. I may turn on my cell phone, it will receive the message but I must do more, I must attend to and not forget to read your message. In listening process we zone out, day dream or think about things other than we hear. Receiving occurs in such situation but not attending. The message heard simply falls to work as a stimulus because we have to attend to some other sounds or stuff.

Comprehending/understanding:

It occurs when you as a target listener are on the same page with the speaker regarding the message being sent and received. A message is said to be misunderstood when the speaker and the listener do not match up and the listener associates words with something other than the speaker had in mind. Understanding occurs with full attention in the early two steps not only by receiving and focusing on the sounds of the speaker but equally on the observation of non-verbal message- i.e body language. To sum up, understanding happens with the assessment and evaluation of the sound and sound maker.

It is rightly said, communication begins with understanding. A message may be received and attended to; however, it depends on understanding to complete the whole process of communication. Remember that one may have received and attended the message but may not have understood the meaning in the message. For any effective interaction it is therefore a must

to decode the sound. This idea can best be represented if we replace the heard sounds as written words and apply our potential of reading yet fail to make any sense of the written words, the same applies to listening in case of making no sense out of the heard words.

Feedback/responding

It is what you take and respond with something back in the form of verbal and non-verbal clues. Non-verbal clues include smiling, nodding and eye contact which encourage the speaker to share more and more messages. Sometimes responding is replaced by remembering a message heard earlier may be remembered for later or future response. Listening process may end with understanding because effective communication and listening may be defined as the accurate sharing and understanding of meaning. However in many situations direct verbal response like seeking clarification, paraphrasing, echoing and non-verbal responses are necessary for the sender to receive back as well as for the listener to understand the message fully.

Remembering

It is the ability to recall or retain the information in the memory for some action, purpose, use or response in the future. We either listen to respond immediately or retain the information for future response as we do in our classrooms and other teaching learning settings. Memorizing and remembering is the key to good listening and strong interpersonal relationships. Remembering is necessary sometimes and this becomes an important part of the communication process. Some people might go so far as to say, "if you cannot remember it, you were not listening". Poor listeners get the message in one ear and let it go out the other.

IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

Listening is fundamental to the three other skills of communication. The efficiency of the latter three depends on the efficiency of the former. It is listening itself through which a child acquires its first language which is also the case of adults learning or acquiring their second language. Listening is the trigger for language learning that is why deaf children also remain dumb for all their life. Language is a window to the world and its understanding. Language is the store of knowledge and this store is learned and accessed through listening.

Most of the people think listening just happens, which is not true. It is only when you start to think about listening and what it requires, you begin to realize that listening is in fact complex and needs

to be understood, nurtured and developed for developing strong relationships with others.

Effective listening is the very foundation and soul of household life, as well as organizational and educational settings.

In everyday life if we do not listen well, we are likelier to land into an embarrassing situation, either as a speaker, a colleague, a member of a group or as a friend. Consider for a moment the amount of time you spend on listening to others or on telephone or broadcasting material. You would find that the time spent on listening is substantial.

A good listener tends to have more customers. Good listeners are able to handle tasks in any workplace. They can ask questions and answer them equally well in a conversation, conference or meeting. It means that only good listeners can become effective speakers. Effective listeners can reduce the number of mistakes by catching and underlying messages in an interaction. Through listening we acquire knowledge information, social awareness and strengthen personal ties. Good listeners are better able to build rapport and encourage their interactants to share more of their knowledge, feelings, opinions and understanding.

Hearing and Listening

The importance of listening is disregarded by many people due to the fact that they think it just happens like hearing which is not the case. Hearing is our ability to receive the sounds through our ear drums. Hearing is the physiological dimension that just happens while listening is an activity. It takes conscious efforts to complete. Listening is the psychological dimension of understanding the emanating sounds and using those sounds for our benefit. This activity of listening can be improved if we try to do so. Thus listening can be defined as a continuous conscious process of hearing/ attending, understanding, responding to and remembering the received sounds. Hearing is just one step in the whole process of listening.