

GardenNotes #016

Listening Habits Evaluation

Read each question. Do not try to second-guess the intent. Answer with yes or no, according to your usual behavior. Your answers may help you discover where you have good listening habits.

1. Science says that you think four times faster than a person usually talks to you. Do you use this time to turn your thoughts elsewhere while you're keeping general track of a conversation?
Yes No
2. If you feel it would take too much time and effort to understand something, do you go out of your way to avoid hearing about it?
Yes No
3. If you want to remember what someone is saying, do you think it is a good idea to write it down?
Yes No
4. Do your thoughts turn to other subjects when you believe a speaker will have nothing interesting to say?
Yes No
5. Can you tell by people's appearance and delivery that they are not worth listening to?
Yes No
6. When you are puzzled or annoyed by what someone says, do you try to get the question straightened out immediately... either in your own mind or by interrupting the speaker?
Yes No
7. Do certain words, phrases, or ideas so prejudice you against the speaker that you cannot listen objectively to what is being said?
Yes No
8. Do you start formulating your response before you hear all of the facts or ideas?
Yes No
9. When people are talking to you, do you try to make them think you are paying attention when you are not?
Yes No
10. When you are listening, are you easily distracted by sights and sounds?
Yes No

Evaluation

Each “no” answer indicates good listening habits. Each “yes” reflects an area where some attention may improve your communications skills.

1. Skip and jump listening

Most people talk at the rate of 125 words per minute. Most of us think at least four times faster than this. With concentration and practice, we can listen and understand as much as 400 words per minute. Since we think so much faster than people speak, our mind tends to wander to other things.

A good listener avoids mental wandering and concentrates on the speaker. – Paying attention to voice changes, facial expressions, and gestures will also help increase your ability to concentrate on what is being said. You can develop better thought patterns by asking yourself questions such as, "What is the person trying to say?" "What point is the person trying to make?" Weigh facts and evidence given by a speaker by raising such mental questions as... are the facts accurate, prejudicial, and complete? Is the source reliable?

2. "Skip the difficult" listening

To quit listening if a subject is difficult to understand can become a habit. You could cheat yourself by "tuning out" things you might really want to know.

Make a point to concentrate on topics that require effort to follow. – It will help if you ask the person a question that will help clarify a point or help you understand a main idea. If you can't interrupt, make a note to ask the questions.

3. Pencil-and-paper listening

When we concentrate on taking notes we can only hear half of what is being said. Write down just enough to let you recall those ideas.

Develop the habit of listening for ideas. – Keep in mind that the more senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch – are involved, the more effective communication becomes.

4. **Premature dismissal**

Be cautious about developing the habit of deciding in advance this subject is not important. We can close our mind to whatever the speaker has to offer. An open approach will help correct this habit. Listen for ideas.

5. **Deceived by appearance or personal habits –**

Just because a person may not look like your image of an authority does not mean they aren't. Some of our greatest scientists, artists, musicians, have not been impressive in either appearance or manner. If you must be mentally critical, wait for the person to speak. You will find by concentrating on what is being said that you will no longer be aware of the person's appearance. Listen for ideas... then be critical.

6. **Supersensitive or argumentative listening**

If you have firm convictions or prejudices, a person presenting a different opinion may unwittingly step on your mental toes. When this happens, you unconsciously stop listening and start developing arguments to defend your position. In the meantime, you may have completely missed the main points of the other person's comments.

A good practice is to learn to control your emotional reaction. – Hear the person out. Evaluate objectively the facts and opinions presented. Try to figure out why the person is saying what he/she says.

7. **Emotional deaf spots**

Certain words can push our buttons, make us see red. They trigger an emotional reaction and we pull down a mental filter tuning the speaker out. We start thinking of unpleasant memories brought up by the use of one of these words or phrases. While recovering from this emotional reaction, you may miss important data the other person is trying to give.

List those words and phrases that cause you trouble. Analyze them to find out why they bother you. Recognizing your response, listing the words, becoming aware of your sensitivity, and learning to be objective will help you control your emotional reactions.

8. "I get the facts" listening

A speaker is presenting a series of facts. While you are trying to concentrate on fact one and memorize it, the speaker may already be discussing fact two or three. After several facts you wind up with a few memorized, others garbled, and some missed completely.

Instead, listen for ideas. – Weigh one fact against another. Look for relationships between facts as a person is speaking and you will find that she may be using several facts to develop one or two main ideas. You will be listening at the "thinking level."

9. Pretending attention habit

Many of us learned at an early age how to pretend to be listening. We frequently do this when the subject is difficult to comprehend, or the speaker is a person we do not recognize as an authority. Or we may have something else on our mind.

10. Yielding to distractions habit

It takes conscious effort to screen out the distractions whether they are audible, visual or physical. Eliminate as many distractions as possible. If you can't eliminate the distraction, fight it by concentrating on ideas presented by the person talking to you.

Source: ***How Do You Listen***, Ohio Extension Service

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