



**Tips from the Bridge**  
**Good Managers are Good Listeners**

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Many people who have attended our Manager's Communications Training asked specifically about listening skills and how to improve them. These skills are especially important for those of you who manage from a distance with employees scattered all over the globe. Distractions are easy to come by when it comes time to listen. The human mind can absorb about 300 words a minute. Most people, however, talk at about 100 to 175 words a minute. In our fast-paced world, it is easy to want to fill the excess capacity by doing something else. Don't. The trick is to employ skills that allow you to listen actively.

Active listening is listening with a purpose. The purpose will change from interaction to interaction, but always keep in mind that you are *listening for something*.

*"Proper treatment of employees is the new 'green' in corporate social responsibility. This is especially urgent in developing nations. The new social compact is that employees expect to be informed and involved. Listening is the number one way to build trust in your employee base."*

*Richard Edelman, President & CEO Edelman Public Relations*  
*Writing in the 2007 Edelman Trust Barometer*  
*Download the entire report at:*  
[http://www.edelman.com/trust/2007/trust\\_final\\_1\\_31.pdf](http://www.edelman.com/trust/2007/trust_final_1_31.pdf)

So how can you improve your listening skills? How can you close the gap between what someone has told you and what you have heard? In an article on [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com), reporter Kelli Fowler provided ten tips to become a better listener. Here they are:

- First and foremost, stop talking! It is difficult to listen and speak at the same time.
- Put the other person at ease. Give them space and time and "permission" to speak. How we look at them, how we stand or sit, makes a huge difference: Relax, and let them relax as well.
- Show the other person that you want to hear them. Look at them. Nod when you can agree, ask them to explain further if you don't understand. Listen to understand them and their words, rather than just for your turn.

- Remove distractions. Good listening means being willing to turn off the TV, close a door, stop returning emails or reading your mail. Give the speaker your full attention, and let them know they are getting your full attention.
- Empathize with the other person. Especially if they are telling you something personal or painful, or something you intensely disagree with, take a moment to stand in their shoes, to look at the situation from their point of view.
- Be patient. Some people take longer to find the right word, to make a point or clarify an issue. Give the speaker time to get it all out before you jump in with your reply.
- Watch your own emotions. If what they are saying creates an emotional response in you, be extra careful to listen carefully, with attention to the intent and full meaning of their words. When we are angry, frightened or upset, we often miss critical parts of what is being said to us.
- Be very slow to disagree, criticize or argue. Even if you disagree, let them have their point of view. If you respond in a way that makes the other person defensive, even if you “win” the argument, you may lose something far more valuable.
- Ask lots of questions. Ask the speaker to clarify, to say more, give an example, or explain further. It will help them speak more precisely and it will help you hear and understand them more accurately.
- STOP TALKING! This is both the first and the last point, because all other tools depend on it. Nature gave us two ears and only one tongue, which is a gentle hint that we should listen twice as much as we talk.

OK, so it's really nine tips, but that's ok, because this is good advice. Remember, good communications skills are perishable and require practice to keep them sharp.

Practice active listening to improve the performance of your team and to ensure that your employees know their manager will lend them an ear when the time comes.

Good luck,  
Bill Salvin